

||| BUFFALO BILL'S BEST WORK! |||

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OR,

Opening Up a Lost Trail.

A Romance of a Border Mystery.

BY COLONEL PRENTISS INGRAHAM,
AUTHOR OF "BUFFALO BILL'S SWOOP," "BUFFALO BILL'S GRIP," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

A LOST HEIR.

DOES it not seem strange, kind reader, to open my romance of the Wild West of America in a fashionable club-house in London, England, amid scenes so far removed, so different from those of our own frontier, that it seems hard to connect them?

And yet, ere I ask you to accompany me across the Atlantic, and then to the shadows of the Rocky Mountains, I would introduce you into the Cavalry Club of London, where three persons are seated in a private room, a decanter and glasses near, while they discuss matters of deep import to two of them at least.

THEY HEARD THE WILD, WEIRD WAR CRY OF BUFFALO BILL'S BUCKSKIN BROTHERHOOD
AS THEY RUSHED TO BATTLE.

There is one present whose appearance indicates the intelligent, shrewd English attorney, and he has with him a morocco box of papers which have an official look about them.

The bearing of the other two is different, for it is military.

One is a tall, athletic, handsome man of forty, with a martial bearing, and face of refinement, courage and intelligence.

He has made his record on many a field as a dashing, daring soldier, and his name, Lord Lucien Lonsfield, Colonel of British Hussars, stands high in the English peerage, and in military circles.

He is possessed of a handsome estate, a large income, and is a bachelor, which renders him a great "catch" in London, but one whom no fair maiden or designing mother has yet caught.

The other is a captain of Hussars, very striking in appearance, free and easy in bearing, and bears the title of Sir John Reeder, a man whose word is authority in military matters, hunting big game and London society.

Captain Sir John Reeder has also won a name for himself, is a bachelor of thirty-four and has a handsome income.

Like Lord Lonsfield he was a younger son and never dreaming of becoming an heir to title and wealth, other than what their swords could carve out for them, they had both been brought to the inheritance by a strange fatality falling upon those who stood between them and their inheritance.

The two officers had lately returned from service in India, and had met Attorney Tweedy by appointment at their club, to discuss matters of great importance to themselves, and to one other.

The conversation between the counsel and the two distinguished soldiers, will explain the situation.

"As I wrote you, gentlemen, this is the whole statement in a nutshell, if you will hear it," said the lawyer.

"That is why we are here, Mr. Tweedy," Lord Lonsfield returned.

"Your title, my Lord Lonsfield, and estates, and yours also, Sir John Reeder, came to you as a surprise, as I understand it, for younger brothers, and far removed, you had no thought of ever becoming more than what your swords could make you."

"You express the situation most exactly, Tweedy," Sir John remarked.

"But, by the death of your kindred, standing between you and your titles and estates, you came in possession."

The two officers bowed and made no reply.

"Now in the case of your honored kinsman, Granger Goldhurst, the case is similar."

"Five heirs stood between him and his title and estates, and like you he was a dashing, gallant officer."

"Have a drink, Tweedy," said Sir John, shoving the decanter toward the lawyer.

"No flattery intended, gentlemen, I assure you; but I'll take the drink, thank you."

"Pray do," Lord Lonsfield said with a smile.

"It seems," continued the attorney, after taking his drink:

"That Major Granger Goldhurst loved a lady in London, and had a rival, Lord Lonsfield, in your brother?"

"Yes, sir."

"Of the merits of the quarrel between them, I am not to speak, but your brother was killed by Major Goldhurst."

"Let me speak of the merits of the duel, sir, a quarrel, with my elder brother on the one side, and my best friend on the other."

"Major Goldhurst was not in the wrong in that sad affair, for my brother forced it upon him," and Lord Lonsfield seemed moved deeply by the memories called up.

"Well, gentlemen, the duel caused Major Goldhurst to leave the service in which he was such a bright ornament and become a wanderer about the world."

"As I wrote you, gentlemen, between Major Goldhurst and the title of Lord Vancourt, and the estates attached to the title, there were no less than five heirs."

"One by one these heirs passed away, since the disappearance of the major, and he is now Lord Vancourt, if living."

"If dead, then you, Sir John Reeder are the heir, and there is a large sum of money which, in either case, Lord Lonsfield as to the heir, will have to be turned over to you, for your claim upon it is valid."

"I have searched their claims of titles, estates, and money considerations down to date, and the duty now is to find Major Granger Goldhurst and make known to him the good fortune in store for him as Lord Vancourt."

"As I understand it, Mr. Tweedy, you have made diligent search for our missing kinsman?" quietly said Lord Lonsfield.

"Yes, my Lord, and he appears to be utterly lost."

"What have you done in the way of a search?"

"Traced him to sea from London eighteen years ago."

"As you both demanded, I spared no money, and went myself on the search, taking with me two of the best detectives from Scotland Yard."

"We traced him to South America, then as master of a vessel running to New Orleans, and which was wrecked."

"Yet he escaped death?"

"Oh yes, my lord, he did, and then went to the wilds of the far West in America."

"You went there?"

"We traced him to some gold mines, and there lost all trace of him."

"You spared neither money, time nor trouble while there to track him, Tweedy?"

"Yes, Sir John, I did all that man could do in the matter, and I feel sure that he is dead."

"And I feel certain that he is not," was Lord Lonsfield's decided response.

"I can go again, gentlemen, with other detectives."

"No, Mr. Tweedy, for Sir John and I have decided to go."

"You, gentlemen?"

"Yes, for we will secure an unlimited furlough, and we have long wished to visit America and see life on the frontier there."

"We will go ourselves, so write up a full report of all your search and let us have it, for we shall start within a week."

"We will pick up your thread where you broke it off, at the Border Mines, and see for ourselves that our unfortunate kinsman is alive or dead, for we will know the truth about him."

"Now, Lawyer Tweedy, get the papers ready for us, for we sail, as I said, within a week's time."

The attorney looked disappointed, he wanted to take the trip over again; but he knew Lord Lonsfield and Sir John, so could do nothing else than obey.

CHAPTER II. THE SHIPWRECK.

YEARS before the meeting of the two English officers and the attorney, in the Cavalry Club in London, a vessel was driving along one night among the Bahama Islands, scudding to seek safety from a tornado that was sweeping the seas.

Upon her decks stood her captain, his officers, and several passengers, while the crew of a dozen men crouched forward in dread of a doom that seemed inevitable, for the only safety for the vessel was to drive on before the tornado; and yet in those island-dotted waters there was danger constantly of going ashore to wreck and death.

The craft was a staunch, graceful brig, a trader between the West Indies and New Orleans.

She had a large and most comfortable cabin, appointments all the best, and was a fleet sailer.

Since leaving the last West Indian port, she had had ugly weather, which had culminated in a storm, ending with a tornado.

The captain of the brig was a thorough sailor, and was doing his best to save the craft and allay the fears of his passengers, when a voice from aloft called out in a stern, decided way:

"Breakers ahead! off the starboard bow!"

The captain at once gave his orders to change the course of the vessel, and as she staggered around to throw the tempest upon her port beam, while working away from the breakers, a tremendous wave tumbled on board, and loud rung the cries:

"Man overboard!"

Then amid a stillness that was intense a voice called out:

"The captain has gone!"

"Yes, and three seamen!" added the mate.

"Oh, sir! can you not save them?" came in a sweet, pleading tone, from a young girl who grasped the arm of the second officer.

"No, miss! nothing can save them this night."

"Ma'e Armstrong, call First Officer Goldhurst from aloft to take command of the ship, and glad am I that I don't have to take the responsibility in a tornado like this," said the second mate.

Officer Goldhurst was called from his voluntary post aloft in the foretop, for he had gone there to keep a brighter watch for breakers, and fighting them through the gloom his keen eyes had saved the brig from destruction, for now all saw them to leeward.

Officer Goldhurst came quickly to his post. A tall, splendid-looking man he was, with a face fully of nobility of soul and decided character.

"The captain gone, Mr. Armstrong?" he said, in a sad voice, as he came aft.

"Yes, sir, and his going leaves you in command."

"I dislike to step into the shoes of so good a man and able a sailor."

"Poor fellow! a sad fate he has met with," and turning to glance at the brig, he continued:

"Send your best man aloft to the place I vacated, Mr. Armstrong, and let the ship be put upon her course as before, for she cannot stand this pounding."

The orders were obeyed, and the brig went flying along once more before the tornado, until again came the cry:

"Breakers ahead!"

The course was again changed, and then arose the warning words:

"Breakers dead ahead!"

The brig was brought up into the wind and went around with her starboard beam to the gale.

But only for a few minutes, when once more came the warning:

"Breakers ahead!"

Then the brig had but one course, and that was to beat up into the teeth of the tornado.

She pluckily tried it, but her canvas was torn into ribbons, and with but one hope left the order came:

"Let fall the anchor!"

This was done, and the brig still drove on, but stern foremost now.

At last the roar of breakers came from astern, and once more the brig was urged into the teeth of the tempest.

Fortunately the tornado had spent its force now, yet still the unfortunate brig was driven beam on down toward an island visible to every eye upon the decks.

Seeing this the first officer decided upon a bold plan.

He would try and run ashore under the lee of a point of land his glass revealed to him, and not go dashing upon the rocky shore.

So more sail was spread and the brig was worked in under the lee of the point, over which the waves even at times would savagely dash.

The lee was gained, but as Officer Goldhurst was about to issue the order to let go the anchor once more, the vessel struck with heavy force upon a sunken reef.

The anchors needed not be let fall then, for the vessel was hard and fast, and to make matters worse the wind was switching around so as to make no lee of the point of land but drive the sea in upon her.

Not a quarter of a mile away was the land, and there the crew and all must seek shelter, for the brig would be soon beaten to pieces.

The boats were ordered to be gotten ready, provisions were placed in each, and at last all were ready to depart.

In the life-boat, with a fine crew, went the half-dozen passengers, an elderly gentleman, his daughter and son, a negress, who was the young lady's maid, and two others, a young man and his sister, six in number.

The elderly gentleman appeared to be an invalid, and he was most tenderly cared for by Officer Goldhurst and his son and daughter.

The life-boat went off upon a mighty wave, as the two other boats had done, and the brig was dashed to pieces almost before it got out of sight, showing what would have been the fate of all had they remained on board, as nearly every one had urged to do, but were not allowed to influence Officer Goldhurst in his decision to trust to the small but staunch boats.

CHAPTER III.

SAFE IN PORT.

"THERE is no landing there! Men, pull for your lives! We must work around this island to a lee, for there death awaits us!"

The speaker was Officer Goldhurst, and he called loudly to the officers of the other two boats to put about and follow him.

"We can reach shore in safety," answered one.

"It is death yonder, and good chances for life here," others cried.

And they held on, held on to their death, for the boats were tossed among the breakers and shattered to pieces before the eyes of those in life-boats, for it was dawn now.

And with superhuman exertions the men at the oars pulled away from the dread breakers, and rounding the point, though turned about like a cork in a mill-race, at last managed to get under the lee of what was now seen to be an island of considerable size and with vegetation upon it.

After hours of desperate struggling at the oars the boat was run into a bay where there was a sandy shore, and as the bows cut into the sands the utterly prostrated crew dropped their oars and sunk in exhaustion from their seats.

Springing ashore Officer Goldhurst aided the passengers out, and the invalid was comfortably cared for, when, in company with the youth, the brave sailor who had saved the lives of all with him went across the island to see if any of the others had been saved.

The tempest was over, the waves ran high, and there upon the shore was the debris of the two boats and a number of bodies, bruised and beaten beyond recognition.

But among them three were found who were alive, and not seriously hurt, one of them being Second Officer Armstrong.

Most tenderly they were cared for, and then aided to the other shore of the island, where the crew of the life-boat having recovered from their exhaustion, had made a camp and built a fire.

The dead were buried on the beach, above the reach of the waves, and once there Lucille Hubbard had recited the burial service, for she had made the request of Officer Goldhurst to do so, as she knew it well.

And a beautiful, lovable girl was Lucille Hubbard, the daughter of a planter living upon the

Mississippi River, and who, with his daughter and son had gone to the West Indies in search of health.

In her eighteenth year, perfect in form, lovely in face and noble in character, Lucille Hubbard was one to win admiration and command esteem from all with whom she came in contact.

Her brother Hugh, then fourteen, was a fine, daring boy, and ever ready to do more than his share of the work that all had to lend a hand in.

Planter Hubbard was a man who seemed to have had an embittered life, and his face showed it.

That his visit to the West Indies would avail not, one look into his wan, haggard face plainly revealed.

Well he knew the fact himself, and he was going home to die.

The two other passengers, a brother and sister, were Vincent Edwards and his sister Helen, who had gone to the West Indies on some business connected with a fortune that had been left to them by an aunt who had married a Cuban.

The negress, Lucille Hubbard's maid, completed the passenger list, and was known as Velvet.

After the storm had completely subsided the following day, the life-boat, having been rigged with mast and sails, was gotten under way and headed for the nearest port.

Stopping at night when an island was in the course, and to avoid bad weather, for Officer Goldhurst was a very cautious sailor, the life-boat, after a two weeks' voyage, was picked up by a vessel bound to New Orleans.

And one night, with port almost in sight, Officer Goldhurst was called into the state-room where Planter Hubbard lay dying.

"I have sent for you, sir, to tell you that I can never live to see land once more.

"You saved us all by your nerve and skill, and in the weeks we have been together, you have been a noble, devoted friend.

"I know that you starved yourself in the life-boat to give more food and water to me and mine.

"You are a gentleman born, I know, and I would that I could leave my children to your guardianship, and their fortune, too; but my will was signed and sealed before I left the United States, leaving another their guardian and my sole executor.

"They will tell him of you, and that I wish you also to be as a father to them, young though you are.

"Now, sir, tell me something of yourself."

"There is little to tell, sir, save that I am an Englishman, was an officer in the British Army, which service I left for reasons I need not explain, and being poor, knowing something of life, from having been an enthusiastic yachtsman, I took a position before the mast for a voyage, then became mate of the brig which was lost, and will now have to look out for another position.

"I appreciate your trust in me, Mr. Hubbard, and if ever I can serve your children, will most gladly do so."

"Thank you! I know that you will, Granger Goldhurst."

The words were faintly spoken, for they were the last he ever uttered, as in a moment after the planter was dead.

The vessel arriving at New Orleans, Officer Goldhurst took Lucille and Hugh Hubbard to their guardian's home in the city, leaving with them the dead body of their father.

But their guardian was a cold-blooded man of no sentiment, offered to pay Granger Goldhurst for his services, and for the insult was promptly knocked down, under his own roof, for his words were uncalled for, ungenerous, and hard to bear without just resentment.

And away from the house walked Granger Goldhurst, while a letter from the hotel to Lucille explained the situation, and bade her farewell.

But, Hugh had heard all, and from his lips she had listened to the story, after which the boy went to the hotel to see their sailor friend.

But, he had gone, and no one knew where, so thus had one drifted out of the life of Lucille Hubbard of whom she had confessed only to herself:

"Oh! I loved him so! I loved him so, and now will never see him more."

CHAPTER IV.

A SECOND MEETING.

SOME six months after the death of Planter Hubbard a maiden was seated upon a spirited horse, watching a steamer come in to a wood-yard on the Mississippi River.

Not wishing to be seen by the passengers, as the boat landed, she rode on down the river at a rapid gallop.

She was a thorough horsewoman, and seemed to enjoy the beautiful scenery and the balmy air that came across the broad river.

Behind her was spreading fields, and beyond, several miles away on the hillside, gleamed the white walls of a plantation villa of most portentous size and grandeur.

At last the maiden turned her horse back homeward, for the sun was upon the horizon.

She saw the steamer was gone, and as she approached the timber about the landing she drew her horse down to a slow walk.

Suddenly from behind a pile of wood sprang two men, one of whom grasped her rein, while the other seized her by her hand and dragged her from the saddle.

Ere she could hardly cry out in alarm a third form appeared upon the scene, and with terrible force a stick fell upon the head of the man who held the bridle-rein, dropping him to the ground as though dead.

At the same instant the third comer threw himself upon the other assailant of the horse-woman, and a desperate struggle at once followed, for both were powerful men.

But the one who had come to the rescue soon proved the victor, having choked his adversary almost into unconsciousness.

"Please unbuckle your bridle-rein, Miss Hubbard, and I will tie this fellow with it."

"Officer Goldhurst! it is you who have saved me, for without your aid I did not recognize you," cried Lucille Hubbard, grasping his hand in both her own.

"Yes, I was so fortunate; but quick, please, let me have one of your reins to tie him with, and may I ask you to then ride for a physician, for he drove his knife into me in the struggle."

No more was needed, for quickly the rein was taken from the bridle, and then Lucille said:

"You must mount my horse and ride—"

"No, I am unable, for I feel that I am quite badly hurt."

She waited no longer, but leaping into the saddle rode off like the wind.

When she returned in half an hour, accompanied by a gentleman on horseback, she found Granger Goldhurst unconscious, while the man he had choked so severely was securely bound.

The other man was motionless, lying where he had fallen.

"This man is dead, this one seems all right, so will be hanged for his work this day, and—"

"Speak, Doctor Ainslie, what of this one, my brave rescuer?" cried Lucille.

"Is badly wounded, yes, he has two knife thrusts, and he has fainted from loss of blood.

"I hope they are not serious, but will soon know."

The doctor who lived but a mile away, and was fortunately at home, then set to work to examine the wounds received by Granger Goldhurst. While doing so, and Lucille with white, suffering face was looking on, a carriage came up with a coachman and footman on the box, and a youth following, who was Hugh Hubbard, for the doctor had sent to the Hubbard Plantation at Lucille's request for her brother and the carriage.

"I do not think your rescuer is fatally wounded, Miss Lucille, but I will tell better when I get him to your home, for I suppose you will take him there."

"By all means, sir; but about these men, Doctor Ainslie?"

"One is a subject for the village undertaker, and the other for the county hangman, so I will get you, Hugh, to ride over and report the situation."

"Certainly, doctor, I will go at once."

"And, Hugh, do not say who it is that is here, for we must not know him."

"Do we know him, sis?"

"Yes, it is Officer Goldhurst, and with his beard shaved off, it has changed him so that Uncle Boyd will never know him."

"Yes, now I know him; but I will go at once to the village and then come here."

"I am awful glad Uncle Boyd is not at home."

"As I am," answered Lucille.

The wounded man was then placed in the carriage, and Lucille and the doctor also entered, and were driven rapidly toward the Hubbard Plantation, the villa before spoken of in the distance, while the negro footman was left to guard the bound prisoner and the dead man.

Placed in the best room of the fine old mansion, Granger Goldhurst, under the care of the doctor, at last returned to consciousness, and heard the words:

"Your wounds are serious, sir, but not necessarily fatal.

"You will need care, and here you will get it.

"I will see you daily, and now leave you under the care of one of the sweetest girls in the State.

"Don't fall in love with her, that is all," and the doctor returned to his home with every hope of the patient's rapid recovery.

Days passed away, and Granger Goldhurst was able to talk, and to explain how it was that he had been on hand to rescue one whom in the past he had saved from death.

"I had made another voyage," he said to Lucille and Hugh.

"I tired of a life where perhaps I could never do more than make an honest living, so with the few hundreds I had saved, I determined to start for the gold mines of the Northwest.

"When the steamer landed two men came ashore, and not seeing me, began to plot to kidnap one whose name they mentioned.

"A small flat-boat lay below, sent there for them by some man in the plot, and they were to take the captive there.

"I determined to thwart them, so remained quiet, let the steamer put off without me, and you know the rest, Miss Hubbard.

"If I rendered you a service your devoted nursing has saved my life, so we are quits."

"Hardly, when you received the wounds in defending me, and once before saved not only my life but my father and brother also from death.

"No, we can never be quits, sir," was the low, earnest response of Lucille Hubbard.

CHAPTER V.

THE SEPARATION.

THE house of the Hubbards was a grand one, and furnished with elegance and a refined taste.

It was supposed that the death of Mr. Hubbard had left his two children very rich, though many shook their heads dubiously when they knew that Arthur Leighton, the brother of Mrs. Hubbard, had been left sole executor of the estate and guardian of the children, untrammelled by bonds.

Arthur Leighton had held a strange power over Mr. Hubbard, was a fast man and had run through with his own fortune, and a large part of his sister's.

But for all this he held full power over what the planter had left, though many said he hated his niece and nephew most cordially.

There was a rumor that Mr. Hubbard had won the girl that Arthur Leighton loved, and that he had never forgiven him for it.

Whether true or not, as soon as he had the power he had driven Granger Goldhurst from his home, and neither Lucille or Hugh dared tell him when he returned, after an absence of some weeks in New Orleans, that the wounded stranger was the person whom he had so insulted.

Having seen Goldhurst but once, and the sailor having cut off his whiskers, they hoped he would not recognize him and so spoke of their friend as simply "Mr. Granger."

Arthur Leighton returned home in ill humor, and knowing the story of the rescue, as Lucille had written him all about it, he went in to see the supposed stranger.

He thanked him in his cold way, and then said:

"I saw Doctor Ainslie on my way home, and he told me you would be able to depart within a week."

"I am ready to go to-day, sir."

"You misunderstand me, sir."

"There is no hurry within a week; but then, let me tell you, that this house passes out of my hands wholly, for I have lost every dollar I possessed at the gaming-table."

"Ah! I supposed that the place belonged to your niece and nephew," said Granger Goldhurst in great surprise.

"You are mistaken, for the estate was left to me, in keeping for them."

"At any rate I am a pauper, and so are they, and we must all get out of here within ten days, unless I can raise funds to pay off the claims now held against it."

"I came back to see two parties about it, but failed, so return to the city to make another trial there."

"If I fail then we all go, that is all there is about it, and therefore I told you that the doctor said you would be able for removal within a week's time."

"I will see you upon my return. Now I go to have a talk with Lucille and her brother, and that means a scene. Good-evening, Mr. Granger."

Granger Goldhurst was left to painful meditation, for this sweet maiden, who had nursed him back to life, whom he had been so much thrown with under the strangest of circumstances, had become very dear to him.

It was not his first love, for the one who had taught him what love was had deceived him, had been the cause of his taking the life of a brother officer, and then had married the man, wounded by his hand, upon his dying bed.

But he knew that Lucille Hubbard did love him, for he had discerned that when she believed him unconscious of her looks and words.

Now she had been robbed and was to be left penniless.

He knew his duty and would do it.

So when two hours after she came to his room he heard her story of how her uncle had robbed her brother and herself, how he had even mortgaged the furniture in the mansion, the horses, carriages and all.

"My clothes and some jewelry, with five hundred dollars, is all we have left, so we will go to the city, Hugh and I, and get a little home, and I will teach music and painting, for I am capable of doing that," she said.

"Yes, and I can get a position in an office and help, and we can get a cozy little cottage to live in, so it won't be so very bad after all," Hugh said.

"Why don't you prosecute this robber, and send him to prison?" came in the deep tones of Granger Goldhurst.

"No, no! not that, for he has all his own way, and he is our mother's brother."

"We will go quietly, and leave him in possession."

"And I will go with you."

"You, Mr. Granger?"

"Yes, for I, too, am poor and friendless, Lucille; but the few hundreds I have I will put with yours, for I love you, little girl, love you devotedly, and you can make me a very happy man if you will be my wife."

"Will you, Lucille?"

"Yes, for I love you," was the frank reply.

"Oh, isn't that jolly?" cried Hugh.

And so it happened that three days after Lucille, her brother, Granger Goldhurst and two servants, Velvet and her husband Carrol, left the old home to the robber guardian and sought a new one in New Orleans.

A pretty little cottage was found and neatly furnished, and there Lucille became Mrs. Granger Goldhurst, and they, with Hugh, set to work to earn a living.

But fate seemed against them, and after months of failure to make more than a pittance, Granger Goldhurst determined to carry out his former intention and go to the mines to hunt for a fortune.

He knew that Arthur Leighton had lost all, and had left the city, and that he could only leave a few months' living with his young wife, so he took no more than for actual needs, and started out upon the trail of fortune.

Three months passed away, and then, just as want began to stare them in the face, a letter came and in it a draft for five hundred dollars.

With it came these hopeful words:

"After hardships most severe, disappointed hopes and sufferings, I have at last struck a lead which I hope will lead me on to comfort, if not riches, for us all."

"I am far from a post-office, so expect only a letter each month, and in each one a remittance to keep the wolf from your door, while I struggle on to get gold."

And that night there was a feast and happiness in the "Cozy Cottage," as Lucille had called her home.

CHAPTER VI.

THE MINER.

In a log cabin, hiding away among the mountains of a Western Territory, a man sat at a rustic table figuring over an account-book.

He was a man of majestic appearance, tall, broad-shouldered, with a head finely poised and a face cast in a mold refined and noble.

His beard was very long, and his hair also fell in waving masses almost to his waist.

He was dressed in a woolen shirt, dark corduroy pants, top-boots and slouch hat, and wore about his waist a belt of arms.

The appearance of the man was neat, his bearing that of the gentleman in spite of his surroundings.

At last he turned from the table, thrust his hands deep into his pockets, put his feet out toward the blazing fire and became lost in reverie.

Upon the table burned his candle, its light dimmed by the blazing logs.

A shelf of books, a cupboard of provisions, a few cooking utensils, rifles standing in a rack on either side of the door, ready for use, some clothing hanging upon the wall, and a bunk with some fine blankets in it, completed the furniture of the cabin.

At last he began to think aloud.

"At last," he mused, "the end is at hand and yet it is but the beginning of another life."

"In her letter received to-day, Lucille tells me that she knows now why we could not get work, for her gambler, scoundrel uncle was working against us the while."

"She tells me that he has returned to New Orleans several times, and each time with funds, which he squanders as fast as it is possible for him to do so, and invariably he adds to her sufferings by his cruel reports against her."

"Poor child! She begs me to send for her to come to me, to take Hugh and herself, and faithful Velvet and Carrol, those noble-hearted negroes who have been so true through all, to dwell in the far West, amid associations where no one will come who knows of them and their sorrows through the acts of Arthur Leighton."

"And she tells me of our darling child, the little baby daughter which I have never seen."

"Well, about to-day she will receive my letter telling her I have dug out of the generous earth a sum of gold amounting to forty thousand dollars."

"She will receive my draft for money to bring them all to Chicago, and telling them that I am to leave the mines at once and seek a home for her and all in the wild West."

"After the blight upon my life I care no more for the social whirl I once loved so well, and will be content, yes, happy amid the wilds of this grand land, under the shadow of these everlasting hills."

"Lucille will be happy, Hugh will delight in the wild life, good Carrol and Velvet will also love their new home, and I will establish a ranch and prosper, having about us every comfort gold can buy."

"How I love the picture I have drawn, and my dear little wife will love it too."

"It is two years since I left New Orleans to seek my fortune, and in that time I have earned it."

"Forty thousand dollars, once a small sum to me, is now indeed a fortune. And it is safe in the Chicago banks, except the belt of gold I have with me."

"To-morrow I will leave, quietly, slipping away from the mines, for who here do I care for?"

"Men have sought to rob me, but have failed, and constantly I dread an attack from the Wolves of the Mines, as those gold robbers are called— Ah! there is the scratch at the door of my faithful friend Claws."

"And he scratches as though something was wrong with him."

Stepping to the door the miner raised a heavy slide near the bottom and in came a tremendous, savage-looking wolf.

"Well, Claws, what is it? You are all humped up with anger, and every hair stands on end like quills on the back of the fretful porcupine," said the miner with a laugh at his own conceit.

The wolf uttered a low growl and sniffed at the door.

"I see, that means that there is some one coming you do not like. Not a neighbor miner, surely, for you do not show such anger, merely announcing the coming of a friend by a yelp."

"You have saved my life many a time, good wolf, and it has been a poor return for my shooting your mother as I did, and taking you, a week-old cub, from her. But, I have tried to make amends by good treatment of you."

"Why, Claws, you act as though you expected his Satanic Majesty to give us a call— Ah!"

A sharp knock came at the door, and the miner asked:

"Who is there?"

"Miner Burt, your neighbor, Pard Goldhurst."

"You should have brought Pard Burt's voice with you then," was the reply.

"You always like your little joke, Pard Goldhurst; but I have a bad cold, and am very hoarse. Let me in, please."

"Not I, for I know you are not Pard Burt, and as you have lied to me I suspect you of being on the hunt for my little belongings!"

"Yes, and I will have your belongings, as you call your stock of gold, Granger Goldhurst."

"Men, break in the door!" came the response in savage tones.

Almost instantly there followed a heavy blow against the door, evidently with a log held by several men.

Instantly the miner sprung for his rifles, turned his table upon end, dragged his cupboard before it, and behind this breastwork stood at bay with a revolver in each hand, while his faithful, though savage comrade, Claws, crouched snarling fiercely at his feet.

"The brave Briton and his wolf pard were on guard!"

CHAPTER VII.

RETRIBUTION.

GRANGER GOLDHURST was a man of iron strength and unflinching nerve.

He knew not how many foes he had to deal with, or who they were.

He suspected them of being a band of outlaws known as the Wolves of the Mines, who now and then killed and robbed a miner suspected of having a lot of gold hoarded away in his cabin.

That he was supposed to have large quantities of gold there he well knew.

But he had been too clever for that, for when he went every two weeks to the camps after provisions, he always carried with him the sum he had to send away to deposit to his credit in the banks, the driver of the coach, whom he had once risked his life to save from death, carrying it through for him secretly.

Now, as he was ready to go, as hope of happiness in the future was opening before him, he felt himself confronted by a terrible danger.

But he did not shrink from it an instant.

He would face all odds and die game, if die he must.

The heavy blows were continued upon the door, which, built of stout logs though it was, gradually yielded.

At last, just as a heavier blow came, he raised his rifle and poured half a dozen rapid shots through the cracks in the logs.

There was a groan and shouts without, and then silence.

But soon another crash came and the door fell in.

He had dropped his rifle now and secured his revolvers.

As the door fell four persons appeared in the doorway, and his weapons began to rattle with those of the assailants.

At the same instant Claws made a leap at the throat of one man and dragged him to the floor.

How many men had come to attack him Granger Goldhurst never knew, for when the Wolf dragged down one man and two fell beneath the unerring aim of the miner's pistols, the others turned and fled, for another of their number, shot through the door, lay dead without.

But the miner stood his ground, at bay behind his breastwork of table and cupboard.

He had a gash on the head from a bullet, another in the shoulder, while a third ball had cut through his arm, when the volley had been fired.

But, he deemed none of them serious, and so said:

"Go out, Claws, and see if they have gone or it is a trick."

The well-trained wolf obeyed instantly, and soon returned, no longer showing signs of rage.

"That settles it, Claws; they have gone, or at least those who could get away have done so."

"How many there were I do not know, but four are here, and all dead!"

"I am not dead, but, curses upon you, Granger Goldhurst, I am dying," said one of the men lying upon the floor.

"Ah! you know me then?"

"I do."

"Who are you?"

"Take this wig and false beard off of me, and you will see. I am powerless to move or I would kill you, yet."

The miner did as he was told, and started back with a cry of amazement, almost of horror, while the name broke from his lips:

"Arthur Leighton!"

"Yes, you know me now."

"And, bad as I deemed you, I did not believe you an outlaw, a robber."

"Well, you see who I am, and what I am now. I heard you had struck a gold mine and had laid up hundreds of thousands in your cabin; so I was tempted to come and rob you."

"Disguised as a miner I reconnoitered the situation, and failing to kill you myself, hired men to aid me."

"This is the result: you are alive and rich, while I am dying."

"Arthur Leighton, you turned your back upon me when first we met, and we became foes."

"When you knew that I was the one who saved your niece from the kidnappers, you sought all in your power to destroy me."

"Yes, and I sent those kidnappers there to seize her, for I intended placing her in an asylum where she would never see the light of day again, and also to get rid of Hugh."

"The man who was sent to prison would have told all, only he did not know me in the matter."

"I expected Lucille and Hugh to fight me in the courts, when they knew I had robbed them, and so wished to get rid of them."

"Now I am dying here in your cabin, by your hand, and soon all will be over."

"I am sorry you die by my hand, for I can never tell Lucille that I killed you."

"I wish the wolf had killed you instead of that man, or—"

"Or what?"

"Or that I could have made you prisoner and allowed you to go your way again free, for I am sick of blood-letting, and it seems my cruel destiny to kill."

"You must have a conscience," moaned the dying man.

"I have, and I ask you if there is aught you would have me do for you, Arthur Leighton?"

"No, let me drop out of the world, no one knowing my fate but you, and you will keep the secret," was the answer.

The miner tried to do something to soothe the last hours of the dying man, but met only with rebuff.

At last Arthur Leighton breathed his last, and instantly the miner took his pick and shovel and went forth to dig a grave.

The bodies were buried decently, and as he turned, the miner saw Claws lying at his feet—dead.

"Poor fellow, you got your death wound too, and I did not know it."

"You too shall have decent burial, and then this night will I go from here, yes, the morrow's sun must find me far away from this spot."

And when the sun arose it fell upon a man traveling slowly along a valley trail, for he carried a heavy pack.

The man was Granger Goldhurst, going to find a home for those he loved.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE MASSACRE.

NATURE had done much for a valley of the far West, where a score or more of brave settlers had made their homes.

With a range of five foot-hills on one side, and one of lofty mountains upon the other, a width of from three to ten miles, a river gliding through it and broken hills here and dotting the otherwise level meadow land, the valley was one wherein to found a model frontier home.

The length of the valley was some thirty miles, and here, upon the sloping hillsides, had the homes of the settlers been built, with many broad acres of rich lands and timber surrounding them.

There were not more than a score of houses in the valley, but they were of well-to-do people, those who could surround themselves with all the comforts of a delightful abiding-place.

Though built of logs, their cabins were large and comfortable, their cattle numerous, and all seemed to point to happiness and prosperity in the future for all the dwellers in the fertile and pleasant valley.

The most delightful of these border houses was one which had lately been purchased by a miner who had "struck it rich" in the gold mines, it was said, yet preferred to dwell upon the frontier to going East to enjoy his fortune in the social whirl of life.

The place had been homesteaded by a man of taste and ability, and after he had gotten about him all that could add to his joy in his wild life, a fortune had been left him in the East, and as good luck would have it he found a ready purchaser in the miner who just then happened upon the scene in search of a home.

Having paid his money, and made certain changes to his liking, the miner went away: after his family, he said to those who were his nearest neighbors.

In good time there wound down into the valley a large wagon train bearing the miner's family, his household goods, along with all that he could purchase to make his home a complete one.

Besides the wagons, well-laden, there were a couple of ambulances, stock, horses, sheep and fowls.

There was furniture in the wagons, stores of all kinds, and the family for whom all this provision had been made consisted of a young woman with one of the loveliest of faces, a little baby girl and a youth of seventeen, perhaps.

Then there was a negro man and his wife, and besides the wagon men, who had been chartered at the last Overland stage station toward the valley, there were several bold-looking young fellows who were to serve as cowboys and farmers combined.

I hardly need tell my readers that this miner settler in the valley was Granger Goldhurst, for they have already guessed it.

In that wild land, far from all civilization, on the border of a country where roamed hostile Indians, Granger Goldhurst had sought a home.

A man, once a favorite in London society, one who had traveled much, had won fame as a brilliant soldier, and who was to become the heir of a proud and noble title and large fortune, had settled down, content to hide himself from the world.

There had he brought as his wife the beautiful woman whose life he had twice saved, whose love he had won, and who had been a belle in the most aristocratic society of the Crescent City.

And there too had Hugh Hubbard, her brother, been glad to find a home with them, while the little girl was to pass her young life amid the scenes of the wild West, scenes that brave men alone dare face.

And in that home prosperity and happiness appeared to reign, for if the settler had any misgivings for the future, if his beautiful young wife felt a premonition of evil to come, they kept it to themselves.

One day the settler received a letter.

What its import was he did not make known even to his wife; but he told her that business would call him away for some days.

The letter was to the effect that one of the Chicago banks, in which he had deposited his money was upon the eve of failure, and hoping to save his deposit there, he started for the Overland stage trail, and, leaving his horse at one of the stations took the coach for Chicago, or rather to the nearest point where he could catch the railroad for that city.

It was two weeks before he returned to the station where he had left his horse, and he was sore at heart to feel that nearly one-half of his gold had been lost, that the bank had been swamped by speculation, and his money had gone with the wreck.

It was true that he had other money, but he recalled how hard he had struggled for his gold, and that he had left it, as he believed, in safe hands for speculation, hoping that one day in the future, when his daughter was growing into maidenhood, and his riches had increased greatly, that he could emerge from his life of self-exposed exile, buy back the loved home of his wife, and dwell there in luxury for the remainder of his days.

It was near sunset when he turned from the trail into the valley, and suddenly drew rein.

Not far from the trail had stood the house of a neighbor, five miles from his own ranch; but the house was not there now!

A heap of ashes and ruin alone marked the spot.

Like a madman he rode to the scene, and there beheld new-made graves.

Wheeling his horse he drove the spurs deep and rode like the wind to his own home.

Desolation, destruction and death awaited him!

"My God! the Indians have massacred them all!" came in a wild cry from the lips of the strong man, who reeled and fell from his saddle.

CHAPTER IX.

THE RENEGADE CHIEF.

LIKE a large serpent, crawling down from the mountains, to strike its prey in the valley, a column of Indians came out of the dense mass of timber and following the canyons and valleys, at

last came to a point overlooking the scene which they were to bring death and ruin upon.

They were picked horses and ponies, all armed to the teeth, all in full war-paint and numbering half a thousand.

They rode in single file, and thus the line stretched out for more than a mile.

There was appalling impressiveness about the silence of the Indian column as it moved along, enough to strike awe to the stoutest heart.

At last in a canyon they halted, and a chief dismounted from his snow-white pony and took a seat upon a fallen tree.

Before him, half a dozen miles away, was spread out the valley in which Granger Goldhurst had his home.

There could be seen the ranches of a score of settlers who had dared make their homes there.

Fields were dotting the landscape here and there, all well tilled, and cattle, sheep and ponies housed in sheds about the different ranches.

The Indian chief was mounted upon a horse as white as snow, except that his mane and tail had been dyed a scarlet hue.

Then, too, the chief rode the saddle of a cavalry officer, housing and all.

He was dressed in buckskin, heavy with embroidery of beads and quills, had necklaces of bear-claws about his neck, and wore to his belt, in which were a pair of revolvers and a bowie-knife, a string of scalps, some score in number, and with hair that showed it had been taken from the heads of women and children as well as men.

There was something in the bearing of the chief, his movements, too, that did not indicate his being an Indian, though his painted face, neck and hands that were visible, completely hid any trace of skin.

He took his seat upon the fallen tree, and taking out his knife, picked up a stick and began to whittle it in silence.

At last he spoke a few words in a low tone, and brave after brave dismounted, while from one to the other some message was passed back toward the rear of the column.

Continuing his occupation of whittling, while his braves stood in silence by the side of their ponies, the chief waited, until presently another chief arrived.

He came up in silence, made a sign to the head chief, dismounted and approached him.

Then another and another came, until at last there were gathered there in a group no less than ten chiefs, in full war-paint and eagle-feather bonnets, presenting a most imposing and picturesque appearance.

The head chief cast his eyes over the group, and muttered to himself rather than to them, for he spoke in English:

"Ten; yes, all are here."

Then he threw aside his stick, replaced his bowie-knife in its scabbard, and pointing to the valley, spoke in the Sioux tongue:

"Let my chiefs behold!"

Standing in the canyon, which looked down into the valley, and shielded from the view of any watchful eyes that might be regarding the mountains, by a fringe of pine trees, the chiefs looked steadily down upon the scattered homes of the settlers, the cattle, ponies, sheep, and fertile fields.

"Do my brothers see?" asked the head chief, quietly.

All bowed in silence that was significant.

"There are the homes of the pale-face settlers whom my red people, my brothers, hate."

"There dwell their foes who are pushing them back from the lovely valleys, the home of the deer and the buffalo, into the wilds of the mountains, where they have to hide with their women and children."

"I have brought my red brothers here to let them behold the homes of their pale-face foes before they ride down in the darkness of the coming night to strike a death-blow against them all."

"Let them see afar yonder in the lower end of the valley, and at the upper end, everywhere the fine homes of the pale-faces."

"Let them see there thousands of cattle, of sheep, and hundreds of fine ponies, and houses well-filled with blankets, with food and all that my red people need to make their hearts glad."

"My red brothers have said that they feared me, that to prove my friendship for them, because my face was white, I must lead their warriors upon the war-path against my own people."

"I have done so, and this night many a scalp will hang at the belt of my braves, and my red brothers will be rich in plunder, the goods of yonder people who are pushing the Indian farther and further toward the land of the setting sun, to drive them into the mighty waters beyond."

"See, the sun is casting dark shadows in the valley, but all will soon be lighted up by the burning homes of the pale-faces."

"I have brought my red warriors here, and I have only to say that there are some people in this valley that I would spare, some that I would carry back as prisoners into our village in the mountains."

"The others must die, all except those I will

lead my own warrior band against, for I know the home of those whom I would spare the lives of, that they may dwell in the Indian camp as captives."

"Have my warriors, my red brothers, heard the words of the Great White Chief Evil Eye?"

The chiefs all made a sign that they had heard the words of Evil Eye, the White Renegade Chief, and they appeared to be satisfied with what he had to say to them, for their grim faces lighted up with an expression of anticipated revel with death.

"Then let my chiefs go to the head of their braves once more, and the Evil Eye will lead them down into the valley."

In silence they obeyed, and as darkness had fallen now, the serpent-like column went crawling down into the valley upon the unsuspecting settlers.

One, two hours passed away, and then there echoed from hills to mountains the yells demoniacal of the red fiends at their deadly work, while the burning of many homes lighted up the valley from end to end, revealing the triumphant warriors driving into the range the herds of horses, cattle and sheep, and leaving death and ruin behind them.

A few only escaped that terrible massacre, and when they dared come forth from their hiding-places, they grouped together, buried the dead and marked above the graves the names, cut in trees, of the unfortunate settlers who had dwelt there.

And then those sorrowing, wretched few had fled in horror and terror from the scene, never more caring to seek a home in the Wild West.

And to this valley had come Granger Goldhurst to find his home in ruins, his loved ones gone, and himself a desolate, despairing man.

And so in time it became known as Massacre Valley, and was shunned by men as though it was a place of pestilence.

CHAPTER X.

A WAIF OF THE PRAIRIE.

SEVERAL years after the massacre of the valley settlement by the Sioux, led by a white renegade chief, a company of cavalry were marching across the prairies by night, returning from an exciting scout after red-skins.

They had taught the Indians a lesson they would not soon forget, had re-captured some captive women and children from one of their villages, and were returning to their military post worn out and half starved, for their provisions had given out.

Bringing up the rear of the cavalry were the captives released, and a number of wounded men, so that the march was necessarily slow.

Afar ahead rode a single horseman, and his eyes were ever on the alert for danger, though their foes were behind them.

The moon was just rising over the prairie and its rays falling upon the horseman revealed the splendid form and handsome but now haggard face of the greatest scout of the plains, Buffalo Bill.

Even his iron frame was well-nigh worn down by the days and nights of constant hardships and fighting he had gone through as chief of scouts of the expedition.

Suddenly he halted, and as he did so gave utterance to a long, shrill whistle.

It was evidently a signal for the command to come to a halt, the wounded and captives moved into a square which the cavalrymen formed, while an officer and half a dozen troopers rode to the front toward Buffalo Bill.

The officer wore the shoulder-straps of a first lieutenant of cavalry, was tall, slender, a dashing, fearless-faced man, very young for the rank he held, for promotion is slow in the regular army.

"Well, Buffalo Bill, have we been headed off and will have to fight our way through?" said the officer as he drew rein by the side of the scout and yet with no sign of anxiety in look or manner.

"I don't exactly know, Captain Taylor."

"But I saw a horseman cross the trail, and ride into that clump of timber."

"He crossed the face of the moon and I saw that it was no buffalo, but a horse and rider," answered the scout.

"Can we not flank the timber?"

"No, sir, for the prairie is terribly cut up about here, and we would not be able to do so mounted."

"Well, we will push straight on and take chances, for we must reach the fort to-morrow as the men and captives are suffering greatly."

"I know that, sir, and I will scout ahead on foot and see what I can discover."

With this Buffalo Bill handed his bridle-rein to a trooper, and walking back a short distance toward the command made a flank movement upon the clump of timber ahead.

It was rough traveling, but at last he reached a wash that he crept along and came out not far from the trail where it passed the timber.

He was trying to pierce the shadows with his field glass when out came a horse and rider.

* Capt. Alfred Taylor of 5th U. S. Cavalry, now retired and living in Washington.—THE AUTHOR.

The horse moved slowly, and the rider did not seem to urge him.

He reached the trail, halted, and raised his head, sniffing the air.

Then he gave a loud neigh, as his instinct told him of the presence of another horse near.

"That is no foe, at least," said Buffalo Bill, as he turned his glass upon the horse and rider.

He took a long survey and then gave the same shrill call as before.

At the same time he sprung out of the ravine and walked toward the trail.

At his call Captain Taylor and the half-dozen troopers moved forward once more.

They soon came up to the scout, and halted at his side.

"See there, sir," and the scout pointed toward the horse and rider.

"Not very dangerous at least, Bill."

"No, captain, and so I called you."

"I will go forward and see who he is."

"I will go with you," answered Captain Taylor, and the two went forward, the scout mounting his horse once more.

The horse and rider were motionless in the trail, and as they drew near, the officer and scout both uttered an exclamation of surprise.

The horse did not run away, nor did the rider urge it, and as the two halted, one on each side, Captain Taylor cried out:

"My God! it is a child!"

"Yes, sir, a little girl, for see her long light curls," and the scout leaned over and looked into the face of the little one, who said, gently:

"You won't hurt Baby Madge, will you?"

"Hurt you? My God, no!" came in a quivering voice from the lips of Buffalo Bill, and bending over her put his arms about the little waif found thus alone on the prairie at night, and kissed her, while Captain Taylor also seemed deeply moved.

"Baby Madge is so scared, so tired and hungry," said the little one in the same low, plaintive voice.

"And Baby Madge shall have food and rest, for we are her friends," Captain Taylor said, taking her little hands in his, while Buffalo Bill was examining the horse, saddle and bridle.

It was a fine horse, and yet the bridle and trappings were of Indian manufacture, while the little girl was bound on securely with lariats, and could not possibly have fallen off.

That she had been a couple of days thus mounted was certain, for her face was haggard, and a bag of food hanging within reach of her hand was empty, as was also a soldier's canteen that had held water.

Not a word could the child tell about herself, or what had happened, but that she had met with some trouble and fright was certain.

She was about six years of age, and with large, splendid black eyes, had a wealth of red-gold curls, while she was very beautiful, though her face was as brown as an Indian's.

She was well dressed, too, though she wore a buckskin coat over her dress, and tiny moccasins upon her feet.

About her neck was a gold chain, with a locket containing two likenesses, of a handsome man and lovely-faced woman, and upon the gold case was engraven:

"TO BABY MADGE."

"Well, my little prairie waif, you shall be friendless no longer, for the gallant Fifth Cavalry will adopt you as the Daughter of the Regiment, and you will have hundreds of fathers in the place of the loved ones you have lost," said Captain Taylor, and Buffalo Bill added fervently:

"Amen!"

CHAPTER XI.

THE BESIEGED TROOPERS.

YEARS after that night of massacre in the valley by the Sioux, a band of boys in blue stood at bay upon a hill, rising like a sugar-loaf over a hundred feet above the surrounding country.

There was a crater-like summit to the hill, as though it had once been an active volcano, though in the thousands of years that had passed since that time it had become fertile, trees and grass were abundant, and a spring bubbled up through the rocks, and made its way down the rugged sides to the valley.

The valley was the same where had occurred that night of horror and of death one night ten years before.

Though deserted in all that time, save by wild beasts and an occasional trapper who had dared visit the sad and sacred spot, it was now, when again brought before the notice of the trader, a scene of carnage once more.

Within the crater at the hilltop were a number of horses, while around the edges of the defunct crater were some thirty men, their rifles ready as they crouched down ready to meet a charge from a red foe of many times their own number, who had there besieged them, and had made desperate attempts to charge in upon them.

About a fire burning in a niche of the rocks, sat four persons, while stretched at length upon

blankets near were two negroes, half hidden amid a pile of pack-saddles and traps belonging to the command.

One of those at the camp-fire was an officer wearing the shoulder-straps of a captain of cavalry, and though ten years have gone by since the night when he found the little prairie waif, he has changed so little in appearance that he is readily recognized by the firelight as Captain Alfred Taylor, of the Fifth Cavalry Regiment.

Seated next to him on the left is a handsome young second lieutenant of the same regiment, and he is quietly smoking a cigar, his face showing no sign of anxiety at the fact that they are surrounded by hundreds of Sioux braves, who even at that moment may be creeping up to overwhelm them.

The other two are in hunting costume of corduroy, top-boots, slouch hats and silk shirts.

They are both men of martial bearing, erect, well formed, and with faces bearing the stamp of refinement, solidity and courage.

They are browned now by exposure, their hair is growing long enough to fall upon their collars, but the reader at a glance will know them as the two British officers whom he saw in the Cavalry Club in London in close converse with Tweedy the attorney.

In truth, they are Lord Lucien Lonsfield and Sir John Reeder, and they are on the search of their missing kinsman, Granger Goldhurst, the lost heir to the estate and title of Vancourt House, under the escort of Captain Taylor and a party of cavalry.

The command consisted of three officers, Captain Taylor, Surgeon Frank Powell, known the length of the border as the Surgeon Scout, Lieutenant Otey Onderdonk, the young man who was so quietly smoking. A sergeant, corporal, twenty-four troopers, the two negroes Chips and Crow, and last but not least, Buffalo Bill and Texas Jack as guides and scouts, all serving as escort to the two Englishmen.

Besieged as they were by hundreds of Sioux, far from the fort and with no help near, as there were other braves constantly coming down from the mountains, it had been decided that two of the number of the little cavalry band should endeavor to go for aid.

Those two daring volunteers were Buffalo Bill and Surgeon Powell.

The hill was surrounded completely by the red-skins, who camped just out of range of the rifles of the soldiers, and to run the gantlet and get through the line was a most desperate undertaking indeed.

But both Buffalo Bill and Doctor Frank Powell understood the Indian tongue perfectly, and they knew red-skin ways most thoroughly, so, disguised with painted faces, and attired in the costumes taken from the warriors who had fallen in the charge upon the hill, they had boldly ventured out of the little fort and started upon their perilous way.

They had been gone four hours, and no cry of triumph, no shot, no excitement along the Indian line had been heard to indicate their capture.

Thus the two officers and the two Englishmen sat around the little camp-fire in the ravine discussing the possibilities and probabilities of their having escaped in safety, or been killed or captured.

"I really feel most anxious about Cody and Surgeon Powell," said Lord Lonsfield, after a silence of some minutes.

"And so do I, for the danger of their going increases the more I think of it," Sir John Reeder remarked.

"Yes, the peril is great, it would seem that the act to go through the lines was desperate, impossible; but then both Buffalo Bill and Frank Powell are men of perfect nerve, giant strength and skilled in all prairie craft."

"They are as cunning as the Indians, appear to anticipate just what they will and will not do intuitively, and more: they are men to never act in a foolhardy manner, always feeling that there are chances in their favor, no matter what may be the odds against them before they act."

"I not only believe that one of them, but both will get through and bring relief to us soon, for it is the only means of saving our scalps," said Captain Taylor.

"Well, the red-skins have allowed the night to go by and have not made any attack."

"See! there comes the dawn," and Lieutenant Otey Onderdonk pointed to the gray light gathering on the western horizon.

CHAPTER XII.

A FOE IN SIGHT.

THERE was great surprise in the little camp on the hilltop as the dawn brightened and no attack had come from the Indians.

Half asleep on their posts as all had been, as the first glimmer of coming day appeared, they had wakened up with eyes and ears all alert, for now they expected the death-struggle, and how it might end not one of them could tell.

But as the horizon in the east turned from gray to rosy hue, foretelling the coming of the sun, the soldiers looked at each other, then out upon the valley lowlands surrounding the hills, and then again at each other.

"Not a red-skin is visible," said the sergeant.

"Not one," added the corporal.

"It is a trick, corporal; so call the captain, and I'll report it."

The captain was called, and with him came the two Englishmen and Lieutenant Onderdonk.

The sergeant made his report, and the officers gave a close scrutiny of the surrounding country.

The evening before, when darkness fell upon upon the valley, there had been a human chain completely surrounding the hill, while other Indians were seen coming down from the mountains.

Now, except the dead braves who had fallen in the charge up the hillside, under cover of the night, not a red-skin was in sight.

What did it, what could it mean?

No one could answer, and Captain Taylor kept his glass close to his eyes while he slowly took in the surroundings.

"They have certainly gone," he said at last.

"And what does it mean, captain?" asked Lord Lonsfield.

"I should think that they have given up the siege, feeling their inability to carry us by storm," remarked Sir John Reeder.

"Yes, it would seem so," Lord Lonsfield chimed in, glad of an explanation of the mysterious conduct of the Indians, and considering this a very good one.

"No, it is not that, gentlemen, for an American Indian never gives up while there is a ray of hope for them to cling to."

"They have not deserted, in my opinion, they have only gone out of sight."

"And why, Captain Taylor?"

"Well, Lord Lonsfield, they want to lead us into the belief that they have gone, and thus cause us to leave the hill, so that they can then catch us in the open field, or a position less hard to take than is this one."

"That would be cunning military maneuvering, Captain Taylor, but it appears plausible," said Lord Lonsfield.

"I think so the more for two reasons."

"Yes," and all were anxious to learn the captain's view, well knowing that he was one of the best Indian-fighters on the frontier.

"In the first place I do not believe that they have captured either Surgeon Powell or Buffalo Bill."

"Or killed them?"

"Nor killed them."

"If they had captured them, or either them, they would have shown us their prisoners before this and derided us, showing that we need expect no aid through them."

"And if they have killed them?"

"It would be the same, Lord Lonsfield, for they would have shown us their bodies."

"Then you think the scout and the surgeon got through?"

"I do."

"And the cause of the retreat of the Indians?"

"They may know of our scouts going, and failed to capture them, in which case they will be sure of aid soon arriving for us."

"This causes me to feel that they have pretended to retreat, causing us to believe they have gone, and thus enticing us to leave our stronghold, when, as I said, they could throw themselves upon us in the open ground and make short work of us."

"So you believe they are in ambush?"

"Yes, Lord Lonsfield."

"Well, Captain Taylor, you reason well, I must say."

"I agree with you, Lord Lonsfield, for what motive could the red-skins have for retreating, believing, as they did, that they could capture us in the end," Sir John Reeder remarked.

"But they will find us too cunning to venture out," Lieutenant Onderdonk said.

"So you will not leave this stronghold then, Captain Taylor?"

"By no means, sir; but here comes Texas Jack, and I will ask his opinion; you know he is second only to Cody and Powell in Indian cunning."

The Texan, known along the border from Utah to the Gulf as Texas Jack, now came up to the group, having been lying outside of the line concealed in the rocks during the night.

He was a strongly-built, daring-faced man, with a cheery smile, quick manners, and with the look of a man who would face any danger.

"Well, captain, they have given us the slip," said the scout, after he had saluted Captain Taylor.

"What do you think of it, Jack?"

"Well, sir, the surgeon and Bill got through."

"So I think."

"The reds know it, and feeling sure of relief coming to us soon, wish to draw us out, so as to pounce upon us when we have to stand up in an open plain and take our medicine, bitter though it may be."

"Just my opinion, Texas Jack, so what would you advise?"

"Lay to and bide our time, sir, for life is too short to fight the devils in an open field, and we have water, grass and provisions here in plenty for a week or more, and powder and lead, too; but I'll scout around after awhile, sir, and see what I can discover."

"I wish you would, Texas Jack, only be careful—ah! what is it, sergeant?"

"A mounted red-skin, sir, is coming toward the hill," reported the sergeant.

"Alone?"

"Yes, sir; saving his horse," was the answer, and at once all was suppressed excitement to know what the mission of the Indian might be.

CHAPTER XIII.

BUFFALO BILL'S STRANGE STORY.

THE horseman seen coming toward the hill had every eye in the command upon him; but yet seemed not in the least disconcerted by it.

He was well-mounted, and in the rig of a chief, for he wore a war-bonnet and full equipments.

As he came alone and not another Indian was in sight, except the dead lying on the hillsides, there was nothing to dread from him.

"Some trick to parley with us," Captain Taylor said.

"Yes, sir, that means they have decided upon some cunning act and he comes to see just what he can find out," Jack Omobundro the Texan Scout remarked.

Then Jack turned his glass upon the red-skin and said suddenly:

"Captain Taylor."

"Yes, Jack."

"That is no Indian."

"Why do you think so, Jack?"

"Because it's Buffalo Bill, sir."

All started at this information, and it took but a very short while to demonstrate the truth of Texas Jack's assertion.

They gave the scout a cheer as he advanced, and he answered it by a wave of the hand.

"That means that the Indians have skeddaddled for some reason," Captain Taylor remarked.

"Yes, sir, and discovering the fact Buffalo Bill has returned."

"But where is Surgeon Powell, Jack," asked Lord Lonsfield.

"Heaven only knows, sir; but if any man knows how to take care of himself in a tight place, Doc Powell does, sir."

A short while more and Buffalo Bill rode up into the basin on the hill-top.

He was again greeted with a cheer, and his serious face showed that he had something of importance to relate.

"Where are the Sioux, Bill?"

"Gone, sir."

"For keeps?"

"Yes, captain, they are away up the mountains now."

"And did you run them all off, Bill?" asked Jack.

"If I did not, one man did."

"Come, Buffalo, out with your story, for you look as though you had seen a ghost."

"At first I thought I really had, Captain Taylor; but let me tell you that the flag floating up yonder was answered," and Buffalo Bill pointed to a lightning-riven tree upon which far above them waved the United States flag.

"Then the old trapper who told you to show a signal there, if in a tight place, did not make a mistake, Bill?"

"No, captain, Trapper Dennis is not such an unmitigated old liar as I believed him to be, for when I climbed that tree yesterday and set the flag, the signal was seen by one far up in the mountains and he answered it so promptly and well that you see there is not an Indian about us this morning."

"You interest us, Bill, so out with your story," Captain Taylor urged and at once the scout began with the remark:

"I wish I could get this paint and these dead Indian's togs off of me first, but wearing them a little while longer will not hurt, I guess."

"I got through the line all right, captain, and borrowed the name of a dead Indian—"

"Of course you knew nothing about how he died, Buffalo Bill?" said the captain with a sly smile.

"I don't think he did either, sir; but I got his pony, and went out through their lines."

"Then, when I thought I was wholly free I ran upon a man who was not an Indian."

"Indeed?"

"You have heard of there being in the mountains, sir, an old white hermit?"

"Yes, yet hardly believed the story."

"It is true, sir, as I can vouch for, and it is the same one who helped Trapper Dennis out."

"I came upon him, and he looked like a ghost, for he has long snow-white hair and beard, both falling to his waist, and dresses in white buckskin."

"The Indians call him the White Spirit of the Mountains, and what his influence is with them I do not know; but he certainly rules them, for he told me he had seen my flag signal and had come to our rescue."

"Alone?"

"He did not need any one else, sir, for half an hour after he told me to wait while he sent the Sioux back into their mountain retreats, they began to move, and at dawn there was not one to be seen, as you know yourself, sir."

"True; but this man, this White Spirit of the Mountains, Cody?"

"I told him who I was, and what the command had come here for, to find some trace of a settler by the name of Granger Goldhurst, and his family, and asked him if he knew of any captives in the Sioux village."

"And his reply?" eagerly asked Lord Lonsfield.

"He had known Mr. Goldhurst, sir, who had been a prisoner in the Sioux camps, and had died there."

"Died there?" said Lord Lonsfield and Sir Reeder in a breath.

"Yes, sir, he had died there, and this old man was with him when he died."

"And his family?"

"They were massacred, or taken to the Indian village to die, he told me."

"So none remain?"

"Not one, sir."

"But I can see this old hermit, Cody, and get the proof from him, if he can give me any?"

"No, my lord, for he will not be seen; but he gave me the proofs, for see here."

As he spoke the scout handed over a ring to Lord Lonsfield who cried excitedly:

"Is it Granger's ring, Sir John?"

CHAPTER XIV.

THE PROOF.

THE ring handed to the nobleman by Buffalo Bill was a massive one, with a heavy setting in which was engraven a coat of arms.

In the ring were the words:

"GRANGER GOLDHURST,

Major First Royal Hussars."

"There is no doubt about this ring, Cody, for I know it well," said Lord Lonsfield.

"As I do," added Sir John Reeder, when he had taken a look at it.

"And he gave it to you when he said that Goldhurst was dead?"

"Yes, Lord Lonsfield, he said that Mr. Goldhurst had given it to him, and drawing it from his finger he handed it to me."

"Then this certainly should be proof of our kinsman's death, yet I wish that we could see this man to have a talk with him."

"It would be impossible, Lord Lonsfield, for he told me he cared never to look upon the face of a white man again, that he had become a self-exile, and would die alone in the mountains where he had long made his home."

"Well, we must accept this as proof, eh, Sir John?"

"I think so, Lord Lonsfield."

"I have other proof, gentlemen," said Buffalo Bill, quietly.

All looked at the scout with surprise, as he drew from his pocket a large wallet filled with papers.

Upon it had been stamped, with gilt letters now nearly obliterated, the name of Granger Goldhurst, and a date, with the regiment he was an officer of.

The wallet contained papers known to belong to the English officer, who had been so long a lost heir to a title and a fortune, and what was more, a written statement of what property he had possessed in England, and how he wished it disposed of, for he had not known that so many between himself and rank and riches had been removed by death.

The writing was recognized as the hand of Granger Goldhurst, and the document was written in a Sioux village, with death staring him in the face.

"I need no further proof, Mr. Cody, than that which you give us here," said Lord Lucien Lonsfield, when he had most carefully examined all the papers in the wallet.

"Nor do I, for here is a copy of his belongings in Granger's own hand, his last will and testament, a poem which he wrote that night after our battle in Egypt, you remember, Lucien, and all else to give us proof of his death."

"I am not a man of exalted wealth, and by his death I profit in finances and title, but I would give up all most willingly to have dear old Granger back on earth with us, alive and well," said Sir John, feelingly.

"Yes, and I would surrender my title and fortune, and the money that is to come to me through his death, to have him back with us, for he was a noble man, and since I have seen you untitled Americans, and learned to know you well, I believe, Captain Taylor, that you are all far happier than our titled aristocracy of England."

"Well said, Lord Lonsfield, and I feel that we need only to have you fall in love with one of our American maidens to make a good American of you."

"I believe you are half-right, Captain Taylor, speaking for both Sir John and myself; but then you have an unwritten law in your regiment that only one of your own men can wed the fair young Daughter of the Fifth, and that precludes our falling in love with her."

"Join the Fifth Cavalry, Lord Lonsfield, you and Sir John, and take your honest chances with the rest of us to win our fair Mustang Madge, the Daughter of the Regiment," Lieutenant Onderdonk said, cheerily.

"It would be worth the pleasure of trying, I admit; but, Miss Madge, I think, with a whole regiment of gallant fellows to pick from, would hardly select an Englishman."

"No telling, my lord, especially as you have a title, and many of our American girls are blinded, you know, by foreign titles, most of them to their sorrow, I regret to say," Captain Taylor remarked, while he added:

"But taking our Daughter of the Fifth outside of consideration, there is the beautiful Belle of the Border, Bessie Bond, the fair Rancher of Ranch Isle."

"Yes, a lovely woman, but a beautiful mystery to me."

"And to all of us, Lord Lonsfield, for none of us can make her out."

"It is only since your coming to the fort that she has been at all sociable, in spite of all of us having sought to bring her out."

"The Wild Horse Catching Tournament the other day at her ranch was a complete surprise to all of us, for no one had ever been invited there before."

"Yes, and I believe that handsome young Mexican captain, who was there, with his Texan friend, will carry off that prize," Sir John said.

"There is no telling what a beautiful woman will do, for the fair Bessie may marry one of the cowboys upon her ranch, or that other mystery at the fort, Don Eduardo Vincente."

"Yes, there is another mystery to me, Captain Taylor; in fact, your land here is full of mysteries," Lord Lonsfield remarked, thoughtfully.

"The greatest of which is your discovery of how your kinsman died, your finding out the fate of the lost heir."

"Yes, and I accept it as full proof, Captain Taylor."

"And you, Sir John?"

"It is perfect proof to me, Captain Taylor."

"Then we will prepare for the march back to the fort."

"Lieutenant Onderdonk, arrange for a start as soon as all can be gotten ready," said Captain Taylor, while Buffalo Bill remarked:

"Now I'll hunt the brook, and change myself into a pale-face once more."

CHAPTER XV.

THE SURGEON SCOUT.

DOCTOR FRANK POWELL* was an army officer who seemed peculiarly fitted for military life on the frontier.

He made Indian habits and languages a study, had gone into hostile camps and cured their dying people of smallpox, bidding defiance to their medicine-men, had roamed through the mining country, acted as scout and guide when the Government scouts were incapable, and, in fact, was second to no man in his remarkable knowledge of frontier life, prairie craft and Indian fighting.

He read a country at a glance, whether on the march it would be a dry camp at night, and was a splendid officer as well, while as a surgeon he was bold, skillful and devoted to his work.

Then, too, his love of scouting was second nature to him, and with Buffalo Bill as his particular pard he had roamed the country over, meeting with adventures that were in many cases most desperate.

His manners were gentle and winning, his bearing military; he was ever courteous to all with whom he came in contact, and cool, iron-nerved and deadly as a foe, he was a lion when aroused.

Such was the man who had, with Buffalo Bill, volunteered to venture to run the gantlet of the Indian line and attempt to reach the fort to secure aid for the besieged party on the hilltop.

He had made his way through the lines in safety, disguised as an Indian chief, had taken a pony and started upon his long and hard ride.

Not sparing his horse the animal had failed him just as a courier from the fort came in sight, going upon a mission to other posts.

Surgeon Powell knew that his mission to rescue was of more importance than that of the courier could possibly be.

So he dismounted the man to wait there until he could send him a fresh horse from the fort, and springing upon his animal, went on at a rapid pace to secure a rescue-party.

Fort Beauvoir was delightfully though dangerously situated.

It was the headquarters military post of the advance line of posts, and its commander, Colonel Loyal was an old Indian-fighter, an experienced soldier and a polished gentleman.

Officers and men alike were glad to serve under his command, and the wives and children of the gallant boys in blue all admired the handsome, brave colonel.

Fond of society, he always aided any enjoyment that would serve to break the monotony of frontier life, and encouraged amateur theatricals, sociables, and lectures and musicales, to pass away the time.

If kept under a severe and perfect discipline, the men knew that the colonel did all in his power for their good, comfort and happiness.

With light artillery, cavalry, infantry and

* Now a physician in St. Paul, Minn.—THE AUTHOR.

scouts at the fort, one could see every branch of the service represented there, while there were constantly visitors, and many hangers-on about the post, making it quite a numerous settlement.

Almost under the shadow of Fort Beauvoir was a frontier village, and surrounding it were a number of ranches, one of which was owned by a lady and daughter, the latter having been referred to as Bessie Bond, the Belle of the Border, and who were most attractive people.

There were in the village a motley set of miners, cowboys, teamsters, hunters, and several storekeepers, with a couple of blacksmiths and half a dozen saloon-keepers not to speak of on large gambling hall presided over by a man who was known as Emerald Ed, and a woman who answered to the two names of Keno Kate and The Faro Fairy, as she was a card dealer.

Such was Fort Beauvoir and its surroundings at the time of which I write, and certainly it was a study even for a frontiersman.

The coming to the fort, with letters of introduction from the general commanding, of two British officers, rich and titled also, had caused Fort Beauvoir to put its best foot forward to entertain them.

Excepting Colonel Loyal and those who had gone on the expedition to hunt up the lost heir, no one had known the reason of the coming of Lord Lonsfield and Sir John Reeder, supposing it was merely to enjoy a glimpse of frontier life.

Having introduced the reader into Fort Beauvoir, I will now present the scene at the time that the Surgeon Scout was dashing toward it at the full speed of the courier's horse.

The sentinel on the tower lookout had reported a horseman coming at full speed toward the fort.

At the time there was a gathering of officers and ladies upon the broad piazza of the colonel's headquarters, just after a late luncheon to which they had been invited.

They were a dozen in number, and while the officers were enjoying their cigars the ladies were chatting merrily together over affairs in the fort.

The report of the sentinel caused all to look out over the stretch of rolling land of which the piazza commanded a view, and they beheld the horseman coming along like the wind.

"It is a courier from Taylor's command," said the colonel somewhat anxiously.

"No, sir; it is an Indian, I think," Major Sidway responded.

"Yes, it is an Indian," others said, and all watched the horseman dash into the stockade gate, then up to the headquarters and throw himself from his horse, when in a perfect chorus came the words:

"Frank Powell, the Surgeon Scout!"

CHAPTER XVI.

THE "FIFTH" TO THE RESCUE.

"SURGEON POWELL!"

The voice of the colonel indicated astonishment, as he spoke the name of the surgeon, who was also known, from his neatness of attire and handsome bearing, as Fancy Frank.

"Yes, colonel, what is left of me, sir; but I have no time to explain my appearance now, sir, so I must tell you that Captain Taylor and his party are corraled on Trapper's Mound in Massacre Valley, and surrounded by fully five hundred warriors.

"I disguised myself to get through their lines last night, as also did Buffalo Bill—

"Has Bill arrived, sir?"

"No, and I am only surprised that you have; but I shall at once order troops to the scene with all dispatch."

"And I will guide them, sir; but it is a case of life and death, so picked men and horses only should go, and we should be off within half an hour."

"Adjutant, give the orders for four troops to start at once, with picked horses, and Major Sidway, you will command."

"With pleasure, colonel," and the major hastened away to prepare for the rough ride and perilous work at the end of it.

"Surgeon Powell, you have ridden all night and day, and you are unfit for the return, so—"

"No, colonel, I can save them many a mile by my knowledge of the country, and you know nothing hurts me; so I will go to my quarters and freshen up, for I am a cross between an Indian, a cowboy, and a soldier now in appearance, as I did not take time to wash off my paint, or take off my red-skin rig," and Powell laughed as a young girl, slipping into the house, returned and held up a glass before him with the words:

"Oh, wad some Power the giftie gi'e us,
To see ourselves as ithers see us,"

Surgeon Powell."

"Just like you, Miss Madge, to show me myself, for I had hoped to escape that punishment, at least."

"But, Colonel Loyal, I beg to report, sir, that I met your courier, Marks, twenty miles from here, so took his horse, as mine was used up, and

I knew that nothing could be more important than the mission I was on.

"I promised to send him a horse, sir."

"You were right, Surgeon Powell, as you always are, and I will order a horse sent to Marks, whose business was of little moment, compared with yours."

"Now make yourself presentable, and return here to my quarters."

The Surgeon Scout disappeared in haste, while looking after him Colonel Loyal said:

"There goes one of the noblest of men, and he is as modest as a child."

"No one knows what he has passed through to come here, and he does not speak of it even, while he is ready to return at once to the rescue of his comrades."

"It is men like Powell that are the heroes in our army."

"All my regiment are heroes, colonel," said the maiden who had brought to Surgeon Powell the missive.

"True, the Fifth Cavalry is a regiment of heroes; but for that matter, Miss Madge, so are others that I can name."

"But can Buffalo Bill have failed to get through the line, or have been killed or captured?" the colonel said anxiously.

His words cast a gloom upon every face.

If in a good position no matter what the odds, Captain Taylor's little command could hold 'beir foes at bay a while at least; but Surgeon Powell had reported the coming out with him of Buffalo Bill, to break through the line, and the scout had not appeared.

This looked ominous, and all felt anxiety, for Buffalo Bill was most popular with all at the fort, and, as chief of scouts was always treated as an officer bearing a commission, for which perhaps he had to thank also his good looks, courteous manners, and undisputed heroism on hundreds of occasions.

"We must not lose Buffalo Bill," the colonel said firmly, and when a few moments after Major Sidway reported ready for the start, he told him to leave nothing undone to find the scout, or discover what had become of him.

In ten minutes more Surgeon Powell rode up to the door of the headquarters, mounted upon a splendid animal, for the doctor would have the best horses to be obtained.

He looked haggard, and his eyes were deep set, for he had had little rest for days; but he was as cheery as ever and when ready reported to the colonel.

Farewells were quickly said and the troopers started off at a trot, with Major Sidway and Frank Powell at their head.

Then came the major's orderly, bugler and half a dozen scouts, and five troops of cavalry brought up the rear, that of Captain Taylor being in the lead, for the colonel had decided to send men enough to be of service, and punish the red-skins as well.

The Surgeon Scout set the pace at a good trot, and thus several hours were passed over without a halt, when they came upon the courier halted by the roadside and with the dead-beat Indian pony left with him standing near.

"A man is coming, Marks, with a fresh horse for you, and he will be along by nightfall," the surgeon said as they passed the courier.

Just at dark a halt was made, and yet only for supper and a short rest, after which they pushed on once more.

Again at midnight a halt was made, this time for an hour or more, for the pace was beginning to tell upon the horses.

But Surgeon Powell knew well the situation in the valley, as he had left it, and he was not going to spare men or horses to get there and rescue those whom he dreaded might even then have been overwhelmed.

It worried the Scout-Doctor not to meet Buffalo Bill, for he began to fear that at last the indomitable borderman had been killed.

Again pushing on, the pace was kept up until early dawn, when far ahead camp-fires were seen.

The horses were well nigh used up, but the sight of the camp-fires brightened them up, and a quarter of an hour after the rescuers came upon the party they had come to rescue, and the first man descried was Buffalo Bill, at which there went up wild shouts of joy, while Captain Taylor and his men answered cheer for cheer, for they too beheld the Surgeon Scout leading the men to their aid.

CHAPTER XVII.

THREE BORDER BELLES.

At Fort Beauvoir there were a score of handsome women and as many more maidens whom it would not be an exaggeration to call beautiful.

Among them all were three acknowledged belles, one Caro Sidway, a lovely young girl and the daughter of the major who commanded the troopers sent to the rescue of Major Taylor.

There was another in the fort whom it would be well to describe now, before referring to the third.

That one was affectionately called "Mustang Madge," and she acknowledged to the name,

though in polite society she was known as the adopted daughter of Chaplain Ben Burton, and signed herself as Madge Eurlton.

This young lady was the same one, grown to maidenhood, whom years before Captain Taylor and his troop had found a waif upon the prairies, tied to the back of a mustang, and whose appearance, seen in the moonlight, had caused Buffalo Bill the scout to halt the command while he reconnoitered to discover the strength of the foe.

She had called herself Baby Madge then, and from that night not a word had been learned regarding her antecedents, or anything whatever about her.

She had been at once adopted by the Fifth Cavalry, from the commander to the latest enlisted private, and was known as "The Fifth's Baby."

As she grew in years she was called "The Daughter of the Fifth," and she acknowledged with the sweetest grace and affectionate consideration her hundreds of fathers.

The future of this pretty little prairie waif had been provided for at once by a small sum deducted from the pay of each officer and man and put into the hands of safe parties to her credit.

She had been adopted more particularly by Ben Burton, the chaplain, and his wife, who, contrary to the general rule of parsons, had no children.

She had never caused a form or a shadow to cross their faces, be it said, and they were completely wrapped up in their adopted child.

Madge studied hard under the tuition of the chaplain and his wife, and had become a fine musician, possessed a sweet, full, rich voice in song, and could paint charming landscapes, while she had caricatured every odd person in the fort, having a real gift for such work.

What she had passed through in her early years seemed to have obliterated from her mind all memory of who her parents were, or of her life prior to being found a waif upon the prairie.

She could recall nothing beyond that night, and the kindness she had received from all had made her happy with her lot in life.

Possessing a superb form, lovely face, with glorious black eyes and red-gold hair, and dressing always in blue cloth, brass buttons and gold lace, she was a beautiful and charming creature, and was loved even by her rivals.

If accomplished in books, art and music, her education of the fort had been by no means neglected, for she could drill a troop, ride like an Indian, and was as dead a shot as could be found with revolver and rifle.

Then, too, she could throw a lariat like a Mexican, and in the tournaments held at the fort was always sure of a prize, while the chances were ten to one she would get the first one, and no favors shown her either, for she was too dangerous an adversary to give her any advantage from courtesy.

Of course she had beaux by the dozen, but the fiat had gone forth from the Fifth Cavalry that she was never to marry any man out of that regiment.

Such was the prairie waif in her seventeenth year.

The third one of those who were acknowledged belles at Fort Beauvoir was not a dweller within the lines.

She had appeared with her mother some time before, coming with a wagon-train and furniture that looked odd out on the frontier.

They had bought a ranch upon the river some hours' ride from the fort, and in decidedly a dangerous position.

The land was in a bend of the river forming a complete horseshoe, and with precipitous banks all around which were better than a fence, while the stream was deep and swift, flowing all the way around the bend.

A high stockade wall, with gate, stretched across the small end of the horseshoe, and right there was the camp of the cowboys who looked after the place.

The cabin was large, comfortable, well furnished and an ideal home for the border.

And here dwelt Mrs. Bond and her daughter, their place being known as Ranch Isle, as at high overflows the land was an island.

They were a mysterious couple, and regarding them, nothing could ever be gotten from their cowboys.

They were supposed to be rich, but of late only had mingled much in the society of the fort.

Bessie Bond appeared to be about twenty, and was an exceeding handsome girl both in face and form.

Like Madge she was an expert rider, shot, lasso-thrower and huntress, and could besides sing divinely, and had some very artistic works of her own brush adorning the cabin walls.

Her mother allowed her to come and go as she pleased, and at night she would return to her home from the fort, always peremptorily refusing an escort.

Such were the three "Belles of the Border," at the time my story opens, and certainly each one of the trio had a right to the claim of being a belle.

CHAPTER XVIII.

UNDER SUSPICION.

"I DON'T half like spying on any one, but then Buffalo Bill's last request to me, before he started off on that expedition with Captain Taylor and the two Englishmen, was to keep my eye on Bessie Bond and Don Eduardo Vincente."

"Surely Buffalo Bill would not have asked me to play the spy without a good reason, and I think there was reason enough when he told me that Bessie Bond and Don Eduardo have several times met in the Skeleton Gap, by day and night, and yet before others they appear to be almost strangers."

"Cody says that they have met before, and that he is convinced that Don Eduardo Vincente is here to play some deep game, and has Bessie for an ally."

"What the game is he does not know, nor can I guess, but I am sure that something is wrong. I'll just ride over to the Ranch Isle and see Bessie, and keep my eyes open, and I'll go by way of Skeleton Gap, too, for who's afraid of ghosts?"

So mused Madge Burton, after returning to her cozy room in the chaplain's quarters, as soon as she had seen Surgeon Powell lead the troopers to the rescue of Captain Taylor's command.

"How quickly Don Eduardo left the colonel's quarters when he heard the report of Surgeon Powell."

"I saw him hasten away to his quarters outside of the fort, and then reappear riding off over the prairie."

"Buffalo Bill says that Don Eduardo is not a Mexican, and that the coming of those two men to Ranch Isle, the day of the tournament, had something to do with the plot, whatever it is."

"One was Captain Leon Luiz, a Mexican officer of Lancers, and the other his friend, Noel Norcross, the Texan King of the Rope, and he is a wonder in throwing the lasso."

"I don't understand just what it all means, but I won't go back on Buffalo Bill for he knows what he is about, and will watch the Don, Bessie and the others at Ranch Isle, too."

"Now for my ride to the Ranch Isle, and through Skeleton Gap, too, though I do not believe there are a dozen men in the fort who would go there alone, and that is just what surprises me in Don Eduardo and Bessie, who always profess such a superstitious horror of the place, and yet make it their trysting place."

"I wonder if the Don has gone there now?"

"Well, I'll find out."

With this she robed herself in her riding-habit, also of blue and trimmed with brass buttons and gold lace, and called to a man to fetch her spotted horse, Lucifer, to the door.

The animal was a beauty, but very properly named, for he was as vicious as Satan to all excepting his fair young mistress, whom he was as gentle with as a dog.

She sprung lightly into the saddle, her repeating-rifle slung at her saddle-born, a revolver in her belt, and a lariat hanging from the cantle.

She was accustomed to go at will, alone and unquestioned, and she rode out of the stockade gate, the sentinel saluting her as an officer, an honor she always received from the men as well as the officers.

"Now, Lucifer, I wish to follow a trail, as soon as I have found it."

"Let me see: the Don circled around this way; yes, and there is his trail."

"He is just about an hour ahead of me."

She saw a fresh trail on the prairie and knew it as the tracks of the Don's horse, and so pushed on at a canter, soon disappearing from the fort.

The "Don" was a Mexican gentleman of wealth, who loved the adventurous life upon the American frontier, and had brought letters to some of the officers at Fort Beauvoir.

He had paid liberally for the building of a house for himself beyond the fort and against the base of an isolated cliff, a short distance from the settlement before referred to.

There he dwelt with his man-of-all-work, whom he called Amigo, but who was known as Dandy Dan, an American, and a scout and guide.

He was also called Silent Tongue, as he was never known to speak unless spoken to.

The Don's quarters were often the scene of midnight suppers and tempting dinners, washed down with good wine, for he was popular with the officers.

He played cards, and for money, but was not known to be more of a gambler than many whom he associated with.

Handsome, distinguished-looking, avowedly very rich, educated and cultured, he was also a popular man with the ladies.

He was known to be a fine swordsman, a dead shot, superb rider, and was said to be a good trailer.

Some thought that he was in love with Madge Burton, others asserted that it was with Bessie Bond, while still more declared that he loved Caro Sidway.

Be that as it may, he had not yet declared himself to either of the three as far as was known.

The Don's stable held some splendid horses, and he was fond of jaunts upon the prairie alone, and somehow had fallen under the suspicion of

Buffalo Bill as being other than he represented himself to be.

Called away at a time when his suspicions were most aroused, Buffalo Bill had asked Madge, whom he called his "side pard," to play the spy upon the movements of the Don as well as Bessie Bond, for in some way the scout connected the two as allies.

CHAPTER XIX.

SKELETON GAP.

THE place known as Skeleton Gap was well named.

It was a canyon, a gap cutting a rugged and heavily timbered ridge in twain, and, as Madge had said, there were hardly a dozen men in the fort who would go through there by day or night.

Years before there had been a massacre of an immigrant train there, not one escaping it was said, and for years the bones had bleached there unburied.

Then they were gathered and placed in one grave, beneath a pile of rocks formed in the shape of a cross.

There was a large spring under the cliff near, some woodland, and yet without it was a desolate place, said by the superstitious to be haunted, and shunned, the scouts averred, even by the red-skins.

In going to Ranch Isle to go through Skeleton Gap would cut off several miles, yet Bessie Bond had said time and again that nothing could induce her to go that way.

For all this, twice had Buffalo Bill told Mustang Madge that he had seen her there, in company with Don Eduardo, who also had said he would not go through the fatal and fateful canyon.

Now Madge had decided that she would go that way, and she saw that the trail of the man she followed led in the same direction.

As has been said, Mustang Madge was a good trailer.

She had made it a study, and she had been under such teachers as Buffalo Bill and Surgeon Frank Powell.

The trail she followed led straightway into the Skeleton Gap.

This she saw and came to a halt.

She did not care to come upon the Don and Bessie Bond in the gap, or upon either of them, for she felt sure that the Mexican had come there to meet the fair Belle of the Border.

So, after a moment's thought, Madge turned off the trail, rode toward the ridge, and, as a horse could not easily go over it, she dismounted, hitched the animal she rode, and started on foot up the steep hill.

She took her bearings and made for a clump of pines which she knew grew upon the cliff overhanging the spring.

She reached the spot and creeping noiselessly to the edge of the cliff, where there was a scrub bush growing, peeped over into the canyon below.

There was the spring and the timber, and there was the cross of rocks marking the graves of the massacred emigrants.

Then, too, there were two horses there.

Upon the rocky monument she beheld two persons.

One was Don Eduardo, the other was the Mexican Captain of Lancers, whom she had seen a short while before at the tournament given at Ranch Isle.

Both men were talking together, and the Mexican Lancer seemed very calm, while the Don appeared to be excited, and the young girl heard a bitter oath from his lips in Spanish.

Just then the bush behind which she was shielding herself gave way, and it left her head and face revealed.

The bush had not grown there, but had been placed in position by Buffalo Bill when, some days before, he had been in the same position and beheld Don Eduardo Vincente and Bessie Bond in the valley below.

Only for a fleeting moment had her face been visible, yet it seemed that she had met the eyes of Don Eduardo in that second.

She heard his exclamation of surprise and anger, and then followed a command from the lips of the Lancer, and she knew that she was to be captured if possible.

Gathering up her skirt she flew like a deer along the ridge.

As she did so she heard the clatter of hoofs in the canyon below.

She ran rapidly along the ridge, and her splendid training served her well then, for she did not grow fatigued as she otherwise would have done.

Down the steep hill she went, reached her horse, untied him and with a bound was in the saddle.

For the first time then did she feel fatigue and realize that she had run over a mile along a rugged path.

Out of the vale-like place where she had sought retreat she rode, and glancing up toward the canyon beheld a horseman not far away from her.

Instantly she set off at a rapid gallop and headed for the fort.

The horseman called to her, but she paid no heed to him.

She knew by the clatter of hoofs that he was in pursuit, though she did not look back.

The horseman she had recognized at a glance as Don Eduardo.

She heard him call to her again and again, but she paid no heed to him.

Lucifer was running free, but he was not at his speed, and a quick glance over her shoulder showed Madge that Don Eduardo's horse was doing his best.

"He would kill me, for he thinks I have heard all that was said between them."

"I only wish that I had; but Buffalo Bill was right, for there is some plot going on between Don Eduardo and those who dwell at Ranch Isle."

"Ah! at last I see the flag, so I will draw rein now and allow him to overtake me, for I have nothing to fear now."

"If he grows violent, why I must calm him," and the brave girl patted the butt of her revolver affectionately.

CHAPTER XX.

A FAIR FOIL.

WHEN Madge drew her horse down from a run she was just riding over the range that brought her in sight of the fort, and she knew that she would be seen by the sentinel in the tower though she was yet several miles distant.

The Don held on until he reached the ridge and also drew rein, while, coming to a halt, Madge looked back and said with a smile:

"Well, Don, you find it hard to catch a girl, do you not?"

The Don looked surprised.

He had not expected a jest.

But he rallied quickly and replied gallantly:

"I always knew that you were hard to catch, Miss Madge."

"Well, a woman has a right to be."

"True, in avoiding capture when it is a man who wishes to marry her who is in chase; but why did you run from me?"

"Because I did not wish to be caught."

"You surely were not afraid of me?"

"Don Eduardo, I do not know what it is to fear any man."

"Then why run?"

"Shall I tell you?"

"Yes, for I would like to know."

"Well, I was going to Ranch Isle and I saw a fresh trail leading into Skeleton Gap."

"Yes."

"Knowing the great dread felt of the place by all, I wondered who it could be, and, unwilling to ride into an ambush, I rode into a cut, hitched my horse and cut across to the cliff, where I knew I could command a view of the Gap."

"Well?"

"I reached the spot I sought and looked down."

"Were you not afraid of the Gap?"

"I told you that I fear no man, nor ghost nor Devil, Don Eduardo Vincente, not even you."

The man flinched under her bold words, but asked:

"Well, what did you discover in the valley?"

"Only two men, nothing more."

"Myself and Captain Leon Luiz?"

"Yes, both of you."

"I went to the Gap, impelled by curiosity, and I met him there, drawn thither also by the stories of the place, for he is a brave man, Senorita Madge."

"Which means that you are, Don Eduardo, to have gone there."

He looked annoyed and anxious, and answered:

"Well, you saw us there, and—"

"I saw you there and—"

"And what?" he asked with increased anxiety in look and tone.

"Oh! I determined to give you a scare, so down went the bush."

"Then I ran."

"Was that all?"

"Was it not enough, for I certainly frightened you so that you ran out of one end of the Gap while Captain Luiz doubtless took flight in the opposite direction."

"Yes, we ran off, for you did frighten us I admit."

"I supposed it was an Indian, and we would get a shot from ambush."

"So it was you, was it, senorita, who gave us our fright?"

"Yes, only little me."

"Had you been there long?"

"That means did I hear what you said."

"Of that I do not care, for it was of no moment."

"Yet something worth swearing about."

"Ah! you did hear then?"

"Only your oath, that was all."

"Well, senorita, I will tell you why I uttered that oath."

"Do not trouble yourself."

"It is a secret, but I will confide in you."

"As you please, Don Eduardo."

The truth is I have greatly admired the Senorita Bessie Bond, and meeting Captain

Leon Luiz to-day he told me that he was going then to the fort to see me."

"What a pity he met you, for he is so handsome, so fascinating. I would have been so glad had he come on."

"He is mortgaged property though, senorita," "How do you mean?"

"He was on his way to the fort to tell me he had received dispatches calling him at once back to Mexico, and also ordering him to bring me along, for let me confess to you a secret, and that I left my native land under a cloud."

"Now the shadow has deepened and Captain Leon is to take me back with him when I am to stand trial on a charge which I am guiltless of, and while now I have the proofs of my innocence, though before I had not."

"Still I must go, and he accepted my parole of honor to return to the Ranch Isle to-morrow and accompany him."

"Another motive for my going, senorita, is to be the best man of Captain Luiz, who, let me tell you, is to wed the beautiful Senorita Bessie."

"Bessie Bond?" and Madge showed her surprise.

"Yes, the sad coquette, for she has flirted with me, and with others, and been all the while engaged to Leon Luiz."

"Now her mother and herself start for Mexico, escorted by Captain Luiz, the Texan Senor Norcross, myself and several cowboys, and the wedding is to take place upon our arrival in Mexico, after which I am to stand trial on the charge of conspiracy."

"And this is all a secret, Don Eduardo?"

"Yes, confided to you alone, Senorita Madge, and I know you will not betray the confidence I have placed in you, at least for a couple of days."

"If you ask it I will keep your secret, Don Eduardo, at least for the time named; but it is asking a great deal to request a woman to keep a secret that is not against herself."

"Yet I think you can do so, Miss Madge."

"As you said that without the slightest foreign accent, Don Eduardo, I will do so."

The man started at her words and replied in an embarrassed way:

"Yes, sometimes my friends say I have no accent, and again considerable."

"That was one of the times when you spoke as though you were not Mexican, but American," was the cool reply of the young girl.

CHAPTER XXI.

A MYSTERIOUS DISAPPEARANCE.

"*Caramba!*" muttered Don Eduardo Vincente between his teeth, at the words of Madge.

Somehow he distrusted the girl, and felt that she was deceiving him by her innocent manner.

It was evident that he had not wished to be seen in the Skeleton Gap with Leon Luiz, and having been, was anxious to know just how much Madge knew of what had occurred there.

At every point, however, she had foiled him.

Now they were close to the stockade wall, and the sunset gun was fired as they rode into the gate.

The man seemed to wish to get away, and yet was anxious about leaving her.

So he rode on with her to the chaplain's quarters, dismounted, and aiding her to alight, raised his sombrero in a farewell salute, while he said:

"Remember, I have told you a secret."

"I will not forget, Don Eduardo; but may I ask when you leave for Mexico?"

"It depends upon Captain Luiz, who is awaiting the arrival of another courier."

"And when will you return to Fort Beauvoir?"

"Oh, very soon, for my trial there will be a farce, with the proofs I have that I am not the conspirator I am accused of being; simply am mistaken for another, through a striking resemblance."

"Good-night, senorita, and be sure of my speedy return."

With this the Don mounted his horse and rode away to his own quarters.

Then he ate the supper which Amigo had prepared for him, and then sitting down to his table, wrote several letters.

While he was doing so Amigo was packing up his traps, as though for a journey.

Having completed his letters the Don held a long talk with Amigo, and then going out of the door, mounted his horse and rode away in the darkness.

Whatever his fears of Skeleton Gap had been, he had gotten over them, for he cut his way short by riding through the canyon by night, seemingly showing no dread whatever of the weird and desolate spot.

Once through the Gap he held on his way, and after a ride of some miles further crossed the river and halted before the stockade gate leading into Ranch Isle.

In the mean time Madge had not spoken of her adventure to Chaplain Burton and his wife, more than to say at tea that she had ridden to Skeleton Gap and overtaken by Don Eduardo Vincente he had escorted her back to the fort.

The chaplain mildly reproached her for going alone to a spot so shunned by men, but she laugh-

ed at his fears and said that it took "more than dead folks to frighten her."

That night after retiring to her room Madge thought a great deal over her adventure.

She could not understand this sudden act upon the part of Bessie Bond, going away so secretly to get warning to the handsome Mexican officer.

She certainly saw no reason for the secrecy, as Bessie had no one's permission to ask save her mother's, and Madge knew that the young girl ruled Mrs. Bond completely.

That Don Eduardo had been trying to conceal something from her she felt certain.

She had seen that his face revealed his anger at having been discovered by her, and something told her that it was well for her that she did not allow him to come up with her before she came in sight of the fort.

That he had not told her all the truth she was assured, and she was anxious to learn just how much he had kept back.

"Well, I will soon know; but I only wish Buffalo Bill was here, for if they have a plot it will culminate now, I am very sure," she said.

"But poor Bill, where is he to-night?"

"I sincerely hope nothing has befallen him, and somehow I do not believe he is one to be snuffed out of life like a candle."

"I hope I have not made a mess of playing the spy, as he asked me to do."

"But I will soon know."

With this comforting assurance to herself the young girl sunk to sleep.

When she came down to breakfast in the morning she found a note upon her plate.

It was in a hand unknown to her, but she knew the writer when Chaplain Burton said:

"The Don's man left that for you, my child."

Hastily she broke the seal and read:

"MY DEAR SENORITA:—

"The dispatch expected by Captain Luiz arrived sooner than anticipated, and as his immediate recall was ordered, he sent at once for me, and as it was too late to say farewell, I write the word I always feel sad to utter."

"I trust, however, to be at the fort again before many weeks, and leave Amigo in charge of my quarters, where I have passed so many happy days."

"I write Colonel Loyal also, explaining my hasty departure when too late at night to see him, and I feel sure that the marriage of the Senorita Bessie will cause many a heart to ache."

"With a farewell to the good chaplain and the senora, believe me,

"Ever sincerely your friend,

"EDUARDO VINCENTE."

"P. S.—Let me add that I release you from your pledge of secrecy, for you can tell about the fair senorita's marriage, and my going to Mexico to stand trial upon a charge of which I am guiltless."

"Again,

"THE DON."

"Well, Madge, is that an avowal of love?" asked the chaplain, with a smile.

Without a word she handed him the letter to read, and thus it was that the news of the Don's mysterious disappearance and Bessie Bond's unexpected going to Mexico to wed Captain Leon Luiz went around the fort and was the universal subject of conversation, for the colonel had plainly expressed his astonishment at the act of the Border Belle of Ranch Isle.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE RETURN.

BACK to Fort Beauvoir came the command of Captain Taylor, escorted by the rescuers who had gone to aid them.

At their head was seen Buffalo Bill, about whom such great anxiety had been felt, and cheer after cheer rent the air at sight of him, as well as to welcome back those who had been so nearly wiped out by the Sioux up in Massacre Valley.

Seeking Colonel Loyal the two Englishmen told their story, showed the proofs they had received of the death of their kinsman, and expressed a determination to start at the earliest opportunity for the East, to take passage for England, where they would have no difficulty, upon making known their story and showing the papers in their possession, of gaining possession of the title and estate of Vancourt, for Sir John Reeder, and the money due Lord Lonsfield from the inheritance.

To say that the return soldiers were surprised to learn that Don Eduardo Vincente had departed for Mexico, to attend the marriage of Bessie Bond to the handsome Mexican Lancero would be to mildly express it, for they were more than amazed.

"She is more mysterious than ever to me," Lieutenant Onderdonk said.

"Yes, and she kept her secret well," was Captain Taylor's remark.

In the mean while Buffalo Bill had heard the news with mingled emotions of astonishment and annoyance.

"I fear I was too late," he muttered, and then he went to the quarters of Don Eduardo.

Amigo was there and met him with his usual smile.

"Well, Dandy Dan, what is this I hear about Don Eduardo having gone away?" asked the scout.

"It is true, Chief Cody, but only for awhile."

"He will return then?"

"Oh yes, for see he has left his quarters as they were, and I am here to care for them."

"I am sorry I did not see him before he left."

"Was it anything of importance, Chief Cody?"

"Well, a little matter of fifty dollars only."

"Ah yes, Chief Cody, I had forgotten that the Don asked me to pay that to you, sir."

"Here it is," and the man counted out fifty dollars in bills and handed them over.

"Thank you," dryly said the scout, and after a few words more he walked away.

It was night now, and returning to the fort the scout sought the quarters of Chaplain Burton.

He asked the servant for Madge, and, ushered into the pretty parlor, was soon joined there by the Daughter of the Fifth.

She greeted him most warmly, and then said:

"Let me first tell you how glad I am to see you all home again, for I was fearful that I would not see all of the gallant party again."

"It came very near being so that you did not, Miss Madge; but I suppose you have heard the news?"

"Of the Don's disappearance of course?"

"Yes, and of the intended marriage of Miss Bessie to Captain Luiz?"

"I know all about it, or rather I will tell you all that I know so that you may judge whether I know anything or not, for I fear I have not been a very good spy, or detective, and you will hardly trust me again in such a capacity."

"Perhaps it was your good work as a spy that ran them off, Miss Madge."

"You still think they had some plot on hand, and would bear watching then?"

"Oh, yes, and I am the more convinced of it, as I went over to the Don's quarters and saw his man, Amigo, as he calls him, but Dandy Dan as I know him."

"And what did he say?"

"He asked me if it was anything in particular that I wished to see the Don on, and I replied at random that it was merely a matter of fifty dollars."

"He owed you that sum?"

"Nothing of the kind, Miss Madge, he owed me nothing, but I implied as much to Dandy Dan, and what should he do, but tell me that the Don had mentioned it to him, and asked him to pay me the money, which he did, for here are the bills he gave me."

"Isn't this strange?"

"It simply convinced me the more, Miss Madge, that there was something wrong; but I shall return the money to-morrow to Dandy Dan, and tell him the Don owed me nothing, and see how he takes it."

"I confess I am more than ever mystified; but let me tell you just what I did, or failed to do."

"I shall be glad to hear," assured the scout, and then Madge began her story.

She told of her taking the trail of Don Eduardo, leaving her horse and seeking the cliffs, just as he had once told her he had done, and how the bush had fallen and betrayed her.

"I hated to be an eavesdropper, Mr. Cody, but I began to feel with you, that those people were acting so mysteriously that something was going wrong, and having promised you I would play the spy I did so."

"And when they discovered you, Miss Madge?"

"Oh! didn't I run for it, and reaching my horse I made him fly too, for Don Eduardo was in pursuit of me; but I had the fleetest horse, and only allowed him to overtake me when I saw the flag over the fort."

She told them of what had passed between them, showed her letter from the Don, and ended by saying:

"Now, have I done wrong, and what do you make of it all?"

"You did just right, Miss Madge, and all I can say is that the Don's man, Amigo, must be watched; but something we do not understand now, caused those people to take the alarm and leave so hastily, but we must find it out, and I hope you will still be my ally."

"Yes, count on me, Buffalo Bill, in all that I can do," was the answer.

CHAPTER XXIII.

BUFFALO BILL WARNED.

AFTER a few days passed at Fort Beauvoir on their return, Lord Lonsfield and Sir John Reeder took their departure for the nearest stage station on the Overland Trail.

They were returning to England convinced of the death of their kinsman, and charmed with the hospitality shown them by the Americans stationed upon the frontier.

Buffalo Bill, as guide, and Captain Taylor escorted them to the stage station. Surgeon Powell also going along in an unofficial way, only from friendship for the two British officers.

Their going was regretted by all at the fort, especially the ladies, who had learned to regard them most highly.

Having seen them to the station, and when about ready to start back, Buffalo Bill was called aside by Lord Lonsfield, who said:

"I am sorry, Cody, you persist in refusing pay for your valuable services to us, but rest assured that you shall not be forgotten."

"Of one thing I wish to speak to you, and that is, I desire to make you our representative here."

"Neither Sir John or myself are men to accept a title or fortune not justly our own, and though we have what we consider proof of poor Goldhurst's death, we wish you to see if any further information can be gleaned upon the subject by you."

"If so, at once let us know, and we will return without hesitation, and let me say spare no expense to find out if any doubt can be cast upon Goldhurst's death, and whether he may have left any heir, for that may have been the case."

"I will do all in my power, Lord Lonsfield, to gain for you other facts, if they are to be had, I assure you."

"I know that you will, friend Cody, and now let me tell you an impression of mine, and that is that I do not believe that Don Eduardo Vincente is your friend."

"I am not alone in this impression, for Sir John also noticed it, and so I warn you, when he comes back, to keep an eye upon him."

"I will do so, sir, and I thank you for your warning."

"The Don appears to me to be playing a game which he wants you out of the way to consummate."

"If I wrong him I am sorry, though glad to have put you upon your guard."

"I thank you, sir, indeed."

"After going so far, I will tell you more if you wish."

"I certainly do, sir, for I know how you mean it, and you are a man of wonderful powers of perception, I have discerned in the time we have been together."

"Well, my idea is that the Don has designs upon Miss Burton."

The scout started at this, while he asked:

"Upon Mustang Madge, the Daughter of the Fifth?"

"Yes; it is because of her position that it is so."

"Remember that she has some six hundred adopted fathers, all of whom would pay a liberal ransom should she be kidnapped, and it would be very easy to run off with her and hold her for a reward, as she constantly goes off alone."

"Yes, Lord Lonsfield, it would, and I thank you for putting me on this trail of thought, sir."

"I am drawn toward the girl, Cody, in a strange way, for she is a noble little woman, with all the refinement, chic and loveliness of a woman of the world, and the nerve and daring of a man, and one of the bravest of the brave, too."

"She could be captured, though, and you would all pay a handsome ransom, to get her back."

"Perhaps all this is nonsense, but I just tell you how I have felt in the matter, and Sir John Reeder shares my views."

"I am beginning to feel that you are half right, Lord Lonsfield, and am sure that if Don Eduardo is in the plot to do this wrong against Mustang Madge, then his ally is none other than Bessie Bond."

"It may be, for in spite of her professions of friendship she does not like the fair Madge."

"By the way, is she to return to her ranch to live?"

"I do not know, sir, but I believe that the ranch is left under the charge of the cowboys."

"Well, I did not like that Mexican officer either, Cody, though I was much pleased with the young Texan."

"As I was, sir, for he seemed a very manly fellow, and I will tell you now that several times Miss Bessie was heard to call him brother."

"Ah! that means a wheel within a wheel; but if they have a plot, Cody, then they have a dangerous man in you to counterplot against them."

"Surgeon Powell is with me in that, sir, and I will also tell you that I have an ally in Mustang Madge."

"Good! then I shall be no longer anxious; but somehow, without anything like proof against them, I nevertheless felt that Don Eduardo was playing a double game, and that he had in Miss Bond an ally."

"But here comes our coach, so we must be off."

The coach drew up at the station, the two Englishmen and their valet got up with the driver, and away they went down the Overland Trail.

When the coach disappeared from sight the escort turned back toward the fort, and the universal opinion of all was that such men as Lord Lonsfield and Sir John Reeder were an honor to the British Army.

CHAPTER XXIV.

HUNTING FOR A CLEW.

UPON the way back to the fort, Buffalo Bill made up his mind to go on a little scout.

He told Captain Taylor he wished to make a

circuit of the fort, and received that official permission to do so.

He then dropped alongside of Surgeon Powell and said:

"Doc, I have a little scheme on hand I wish you would help in."

"I am with you, Bill, so fire away," was the ready answer of the surgeon.

"I wish you to drop out of the command a couple of hours after I do, and Captain Taylor says that he will make slow marches to reach the fort late at night, so no one will know whether we go in with the escort or not, and it will be, of course, supposed that we do."

"I will ask the captain to send Texas Jack out also, and I will tell you why."

"Fire away, Bill."

"I intend to go to the Ranch Isle, and I desire whoever is there now in charge to think I am alone."

"I see."

"Then you come on and reconnoiter, and keep close at hand, but hidden, if possible."

"I will drop Jack a line to follow you, and keep in the timber near the entrance to the Ranch Isle."

"All right, Bill, I think I understand that you are on a trail that leads into Ranch Isle, and of course you have a good motive."

"Just this, Frank."

"I wish to find out something about the dwellers at Ranch Isle, why Mrs. Bond and her daughter went away, and the Don accompanied them, a man who hardly more than seemed acquainted with them."

"There is something suspicious about those people and their movements, and as I never keep anything from you I am going to explain the situation as I see it."

"I shall be glad to hear, Bill, all that you wish to tell me."

"I may be all wrong, Frank, but I think not, and you can be the judge after you have heard what I have to say."

"I'll give you my candid opinion, Bill, as you know."

"Oh, yes, I know that, Frank; but I have an ally that you will be glad to know of, and we will be a strong team with you and Jack to aid us."

Then Buffalo Bill told of his discovering the secret meetings between Don Eduardo and Bessie Bond, and what Madge had seen afterward, and all that the Mexican had said, ending with:

"Now, Frank, I begin to agree with Miss Madge, that the Don is no Mexican, and why should he go to Mexico to stand trial for an alleged crime, for would he go if such was the case, when only Captain Luiz came after him, as he asserted to the Daughter of the Fifth?"

"Now I wish to see just how Ranch Isle was left, and know something about those who dwell there."

"I am with you, Bill, in all that you wish to do, but we must go slow and allow no one to suspect that we are upon a trail, or it may spoil all."

"Yes, that will be our only chance of success."

"Now, Bill, tell me frankly what you suspect the Don and those people of?"

"Frank, I do not know."

"You have an idea?"

"No, I have only a suspicion that they are engaged in some plot, that they are up to deviltry, and only Lord Lonsfield gave me a hint that Madge might be the one they were plotting against."

"Bill, we must sift this matter to the bottom, for you frighten me now," and the fine face of the Surgeon Scout became clouded with anxiety.

Soon after this the scout dropped slowly back to the rear, and gradually allowed the command to go on without him.

When it was out of sight he branched off to the left, and set off at a swifter gait, on a trail which he knew would lead him to Skeleton Gap.

After the escort had gone some miles further, Surgeon Powell said to Captain Taylor:

"Cody is off on a little scout, Taylor, and I am going to drop out also."

"He asked me to give you this note, and request you to hand it in person to Texas Jack."

"Something is up, Powell, when you and our two best scouts are needed out of the fort," the captain said, with a smile.

"Yes, we wish to see if we can find a trail, a blind one, such as the one we went on to discover the lost heir."

"But you found the trail, blind one though it was."

"Oh, yes, and if we find this trail, captain, you will be the first one to know about it, and I have to request you, without saying more, not to allow the Daughter of the Fifth to leave the fort alone, as she has been doing."

"Make the request of her that she does not go, and tell her you have your reasons for doing so."

"I will do so, Frank, and I will hand this note in person to Jack," was the answer of the gallant captain, who felt sure that at the proper time he would know what was then being kept a secret from him.

Soon after [Surgeon Powell dropped back to the rear, and in a little while had disappeared.

He too branched off to the left and made in the direction of Skeleton Gap.

Captain Taylor held on slowly, for he did not wish to reach the fort until late in the night, as he had promised Buffalo Bill to do.

Arriving there he handed the letter to Texas Jack, who mounted his horse and also rode away toward Skeleton Gap.

CHAPTER XXV.

BUFFALO BILL'S TRAIL.

BUFFALO BILL went on his way toward Ranch Isle at a pace that he knew would bring him there just before nightfall.

He approached it by way of the timber, so was not seen until he was within half a mile of the stockade wall across the narrow neck, which was the connecting link with the main land.

He kept his field-glass to his eyes, to note any movements on the part of the three or four cowboys belonging to the ranch, and who had their camp at the stockade wall, in which there was a heavy gate, which was raised and lowered by a windlass.

He had gotten to the neck of land before he was discovered.

At once he heard a shrill whistle, and two men appeared at the stockade gate.

He rode on, ready to meet any hostile movement on their part, but they did not move, only stood awaiting his approach in silence.

That they were standing upon something behind the heavy gate the scout knew, for otherwise it would have risen above their heads.

"It would take a piece of artillery to batter that gate and stockade wall down," muttered Buffalo Bill, as he rode forward, and then he said politely:

"Good-evening, pard."

"Can you kindly look after a tired-out traveler to-night, for my horse and myself are about dead beat?"

The men gave a quick glance at each other, and one asked:

"Which way from, Buffalo Bill?"

"I have been guiding the Englishmen who were at the fort to the Overland Trail, to take the coach East, and branched off on a scout, and don't wish to ride on to the fort if I can help it to-night."

"You know the Belle's orders, I believe?"

"Not to entertain any one?"

"Yes."

"I of course know that she had few guests; but I am aware that she entertained Captain Luiz and the Texan, and she gave us all a splendid tournament here, so I thought she might have broken through with her rule."

"She didn't tell us so; but what does yer say, pard?" and the man who had spoken turned to his companion, who answered:

"I hates to drive a man off at night, pard, so I says let Buffalo Bill stay."

"I can bunk in here with you, men."

"No, you'll have to go up to the house, for Half-Breed Harry is there and can look you up some supper and give you a sleeping place, for this is our camp, you know."

"Just as you say; but is it really true that Miss Bessie has gone to Mexico to marry the Mexican captain?"

"So we got it, and I guess it is so."

"But she will return here surely?"

"Yes, maybe; but her mother will anyhow."

"And you two men are left in charge?"

"There is three of us here and Half-Breed Harry up at the house."

"I remember meeting you on the trail once when you were looking for Half-Breed Harry, when you told me he had stolen your gold, watches and other things and gotten away."

"Oh, we caught him, we did, and Miss Bessie begged him off, as we got all back again; but Pony Pete here will go up to the house with you, and see that it is all right."

If Buffalo Bill was right in his surmise about the dwellers at Ranch Isle, he knew that it was a very dangerous undertaking for him to go alone into the midst of men who might be his foes.

He knew that it was said at the fort that there were but five cowboys on the Ranch, but he also knew that he had seen several more than that number on the day of the tournament given there some two weeks before.

The excuse given by the two men regarding Half-Breed Harry, did not satisfy him, for he felt at the time he had met the men they had been on his trail, and were not looking for their companion as they asserted.

But Buffalo Bill was willing to take all chances, and so rode on with Pony Pete up to the ranch.

A better and more comfortable house than the Bond cabin was not to be found on the border, and the scout could not but admire it as he rode up to the place.

There was one thing that the scout thought that he noticed, but he was not sure, as the foliage about the cabin concealed it partially from his view, and that was that the blinds were open when he got his first glimpse, and closed when he again came into view of it.

As they halted in front of the broad piazza,

Half-Breed Harry came around the house and nodded to the scout.

He was of Mexican and Indian blood, and his face was by no means prepossessing.

"Here, pard; Buffalo Bill wants ter put up fer ther night at ther ranch, him and his horse both bein' played out; an I we agreed, as ther missus wasn't here, we'd give him the permit, so you'll look arter him, won't yer?"

"I'll take care of the senior, pard," answered Half-Breed Harry, and Buffalo Bill had watched the face of each man for some sign between them.

His watchfulness was rewarded, for he saw that there were certain telegraphic signs exchanged, and this placed him more upon his guard.

The other man now went back, and Half-Breed Harry showed the scout where he could stake his horse out, after which he led him into the outer building used as a kitchen, and told him to make himself at home while he prepared supper.

The scout took a seat facing the door, for it was growing dark now, and he wished to be ready for a surprise, if any was intended.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE SCOUT GUEST.

WHILE waiting and watching for Half-Breed Harry to get his supper, Buffalo Bill had ample time to study the situation he found himself in.

The cowboy appeared not to notice his guest, but went on with his work in a way that showed that he knew at least how to cook well.

There was a prairie chicken nicely broiled, some bacon, potatoes baked in the ashes, and a cup of delicious coffee, all of which the scout ate with a relish, and in which he was joined by the half-breed.

After supper was over, he lighted his pipe and determined to draw the man out all he could, and see if he could make any discoveries.

"Well, pard," he said, as he puffed away at his pipe, "I am glad you reomrades did not hang you for getting away with their gold and valuables that day."

"I don't understand, Senior Buffalo Bill."

"I refer to the time when your comrades took your trail, and vowed to me they would hang you if they caught you."

"It was not me that they were after, senior."

"You are Half-Breed Harry?"

"So I am called."

"Then you are the man they were after."

"When?"

The scout explained the exact time when he had met the men on the trail of their comrade.

"They deceived you, senior, for I am no thief."

"I am master here when the Seniorita Bessie is not at home."

"I thought that her mother was the owner."

The man made no reply as to that, but answered:

"I am master now, for the seniorita is away, and I am cowboy chief when she is here."

"And so she has gone off to be married?"

"Yes, senior."

"Will she be gone long?"

"Perhaps."

"She will cause a good many heart-aches among the officers at the fort, by getting married."

"She loves the Senior Captain Luiz, senior."

"And what a fine fellow that young Texan was?"

"The Senior Noel Norcross is a fine man, senior."

"Now I should have thought that he was the man to have won this Bessie's love?"

The man looked fixedly at Buffalo Bill for an instant and yet made no reply.

At last he arose and said:

"I will show the senior where he is to sleep."

In silence Buffalo Bill followed him to one wing of the dwelling cabin, and was ushered into a very pleasant room.

There was a bed, table, couple of easy-chairs and some other pieces of furniture in the room, and curtains hung over the windows.

"I will call the senior for breakfast," said the half-breed and he left the room, closing the door quickly, yet, quickly as it was done, the scout heard a key turn in the lock on the outside.

He made no move, then, but soon after put the candle out, after he had taken in the bearings of the room, so as to know how to move in the dark.

Then he moved noiselessly to the door, and after a trial found that it was really locked on the outside.

His next move was to the nearest window.

To his surprise he discovered that there was no window there.

The next one was a window, but the sash was screwed down, and the third one was in the same condition.

He might have supposed the house had been thus securely closed but for the fact that the door had been locked behind him.

He had observed that there was a door in the room leading into the other part of the house, or at least he had supposed that it did.

To this door he made his way, but it was fastened, and upon the other side.

"I am caught, like a rat in a trap," he muttered, and for some time he stood in silence in the dark, wondering what was best to be done.

At last he lighted his candle again, and began to reconnoiter the windows once more.

They were certainly securely closed, and the screws were large and numerous that held them.

Without a screw-driver he could not open them, and with one it would be the work of several hours.

The door did not show how it was fastened, but examining it closely the scout saw that it was scraped upon one side, and this could only be done by raising and lowering it.

Sticking the blade of his bowie-knife into the wood, he saw that he could raise the door a little.

After several failures he got it up enough to place his fingers beneath, and thus he raised it several feet, so that he could enter the next room.

This proved to be a store-room, with doors opening upon the piazza, rear and front; but these were also locked.

"This place will do for me to-night, I guess," grinsaid the scout, and he got his traps out of the bedroom, lowered the door once more by aid of a rope, which he found upon the store-room side, and then took refuge behind a pile of provision-boxes.

"I've got the odds against me, that is certain, but I'll bet ten to one that Frank Powell is within hearing of my war-cry if I open, and Texas Jack will not be far from the doctor when he is wanted, and we then will own Ranch Isle before morning, if they mean any deviltry toward me, and it certainly looks that way."

"The bed in there would be more comfortable for a night's rest, but this corner is the safest," and the scout placed his repeating-rifle at hand, and had his revolvers ready for instant use if needed.

Thus a couple of hours passed, and he had sunk to sleep, but awoke in an instant as he heard a slight clicking sound at the door of the store-room.

"I'm on the right trail here," he grimly said, and as though to verify his words the door softly opened, and three men entered noiselessly, one of them bearing a light.

CHAPTER XXVII.

AT CLOSE QUARTERS.

THE three men entered as noiselessly as Indians.

One was Pony Pete, another his comrade at the gate, and the third a stranger to the scout.

The half-breed was not there, or at least had not yet become visible.

The men went slowly toward the sliding door and without a word, or the slightest sound two of them took hold of the ropes hanging down on each side and going up over pulleys at each corner.

The man holding the lantern shut the slides and all was darkness.

It was possible for Buffalo Bill, from his position to spring out of the door which the men had left ajar, give his war-cry as a signal for Frank Powell, who in turn would utter his ringing battle-call for Texas Jack, and thus place himself upon an equal footing with the three cowboys.

But Buffalo Bill was not going to seek safety in flight, nor ask aid until it was actually needed.

With this determination he remained quiet to watch proceedings.

The absence of the cowboy half-breed told him that there was one more to deal with that he knew of, and there might be more, for surely they would not leave the stockade gate unguarded, he thought.

Noiselessly the door began to rise, and at last it arose to a height when the three men appeared satisfied, for the lantern suddenly flashed forth its rays directly upon the bed, and three revolvers flashed together.

They had been fired at random, so sure were the intended murderers that their victim was asleep in the bed.

But three other shots rung out as quickly as the trigger could be pulled and from the scout's revolver.

Wild yells of alarm came from two of the men, while the third fell heavily, and falling upon the lantern he held it was extinguished.

There was random shooting then running feet, a quick command, and the door closed behind the escaping murderers.

"Not hurt, and I hold the fort," coolly said Buffalo Bill and he instantly changed his position just as he heard afar off the weird, wild war-cry of Frank Powell.

"Bravo for Powell!"

"He was at the very stockade I believe," cried Buffalo Bill, and he made his way to the door.

It was locked upon the inside, and so he went to the door between the two rooms, stumbling over the body of the man he had shot as he did so.

"Dead!" he said laconically, as he bent over and placed his fingers upon the pulse.

"Ah! here comes Powell at a run."

"I only hope he won't run into a hornets' nest, for I cannot get out to help him," said Buffalo Bill as he heard the rapid clatter of hoofs without.

Then came the same wild war-cry, and it was answered in the distance, sounding like an echo.

"That's Jack's note," cried Buffalo Bill, and he gave his own war-cry, so well known to his comrades, and which was deafening there within the walls of the house.

"Ho, Bill, glad to hear that music, for I thought you were dead," cried Frank Powell without.

"No, I am not hurt, but look out for a shot in the dark, for the devils are about; but first let me out of this bird-cage, for I am locked in."

Guided by the scout's direction, Frank Powell sought the door, the key was in the lock, and in a moment more the two friends had grasped hands.

"What is it, Bill?"

"These cowboys played a killing game on me, but I was too wide-awake for them, and one lies dead inside there; why I missed the others I do not know."

"I rode over a man back yonder, and he was either dying or dead."

"Then that accounts for two."

"And there were three?"

"Yes, and a fourth, Half-Breed Harry, though he did not come into the cabin after me—ah! here comes Jack, for hear him tune up," and again the Texan's war-cry was heard.

Buffalo Bill and Frank Powell promptly answered it and then came a call from the outer cabin where Bill had had supper.

Cautiously the two were approached, and Buffalo Bill called out:

"Well, who are you in there?"

"Half-Breed Harry, senior."

"Get a light, please."

"So as to give you a chance to shoot us—oh, no!"

"Not so, senior, for I am in irons, and was gagged also, but just got the gag out of my mouth."

"Are your feet bound?"

"Yes, senior."

"Who did it?"

"Those cowboys, because I would not help them murder and rob you, for they said you had been to the Overland Station for money sent through on the coach to the paymaster at the fort."

"I'll take chances on you, pard."

"You, Doc, stand by with Jack to see if there is any trap set," said Buffalo Bill, and he entered the cabin just as Texas Jack rode up at a run, a revolver in each hand.

"Ho, Jack, don't shoot your friends!" cried Frank Powell.

"Who am I to shoot, doctor?" answered Texas Jack, as he threw himself from his horse.

"Wait and see, for perhaps there will be no more need of killing any one."

"Where is Bill, sir?"

"Gone into that hole in the dark."

"Ho, Cody, how do you make it?"

"I've found a candle and a match," and at the moment there came a flash of light, and the candle was lighted.

Then the three comrades took a look at the situation, while Buffalo Bill remarked:

"Pard Half-Breed Harry, you have told the truth, for you do appear to be in hard luck."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE HALF-BREED'S STORY.

THE light revealed the half-breed in a chair, his feet thrust through the rounds and ironed.

There were manacles upon his wrists, too, and about his neck hung a gag which he had managed to get out of his mouth in some way.

"They were murderers and robbers, senior, and because I would not aid them this is the way they did me."

"They gagged me because I sought to warn you by calling out."

"Oh, senior! they meant to kill and rob you."

The man was trembling all over, and looked the picture of despair, but Buffalo Bill said:

"Yet you locked the door on me when you came out."

"Yes, senior, and took the key, for I was afraid of those men."

"Why did you not warn me?"

"I dared not do so, senior, for I was not sure, and I thought if they meant evil I could talk them out of it."

"When they sent you here to stay all night I feared that they intended mischief, but did not believe they would go so far, senior, until they came to me, got the key by force and treated me as you see."

"Did you kill them, Senior Bill?"

"How many were on the ranch?"

"Three besides myself, Senior Bill."

"Then I killed two and one is yet left to hunt down."

"There was no one left at the gate, senior, so he has gone, and it will be hard to find him in the night."

"True, but I am rather good at following a trail," was the laconic answer.

Then he said:

"Well, pard, you seem to have been badly treated for acting square toward me, and I'll set you free at once."

"Then we will camp here until morning and talk over matters."

"You saw no one at the gate, doctor, as you came through?"

"No, Bill, I saw no one, and I was lying hidden within a hundred yards of the gate when I heard the shooting, so went back for my horse and made the run to your aid."

"I had to jump over and raise the gate, and that detained me awhile."

"And you saw no one, Jack?"

"Only the horses as I came through, standing over by the little cabin."

"The gate was up, so I came on without stopping, Bill, but was too late to do you any good."

"As I was, Bill."

"No, indeed, for had I been alone, and the one who heard your cries knew that I was not, that fellow could have had me at a disadvantage, being out in the dark; but he ran for it and has made his escape."

"Now let us get this poor fellow free," and after some difficulty the half-breed was freed of his irons.

The horse of Buffalo Bill was found staked out where he had left him, and the animals of Surgeon Powell and Texas Jack were placed with him, while Half-Breed Harry set to work to get supper for the doctor and Jack at the request of Cody.

While he was thus engaged the scouts went on a search about the place.

The body of the man in the yard was taken into the cabin, where the other lay, just where he had fallen by the slide-door.

"It was Pony Pete who got away," said Buffalo Bill, recognizing the other man who had been at the gate, and noting that he did not know the other one.

"He will place many a mile between himself and the ranch by morning," Texas Jack said.

"Yes, and he evidently took the best horse in the ranch; but it would be well to go down and lower the gate, in case the cattle might stroll that way," and the trip at once went there.

They found the gate still up as Surgeon Powell had left it, and lowered it.

Then they went into the cowboys' cabin, where a fire was burning upon the hearth, and found it vacant, while things scattered about showed a very hasty packing up by some one, without doubt the man who had made his escape.

There were drops of blood here and there visible, and Frank Powell said:

"Your three shots all told, Bill, for that fellow was wounded, though how seriously we can not tell."

"I guess he took all the horses kept at the cabin here with him," and Surgeon Powell walked out followed by the others, to see if the horses were gone.

One only remained, and Buffalo Bill had observed three, all of them fine animals, when he entered the stockade gate.

"He has gone, well mounted and with another good horse in lead."

"He will be that much easier to trail, and can not go so fast," said Buffalo Bill.

The three comrades then returned to the kitchen-cabin where the half-breed had taken great pains to cook a very tempting supper.

While the doctor and Texas Jack were eating Buffalo Bill asked the half-breed:

"Now, Half-Breed Harry, let us understand each other, for it is a very serious matter to give a man shelter and then attempt to kill him."

"How do you explain it?"

"Just this way, senior, that the Senorita Bessie being away these men determined to kill and rob you, for somehow they had an idea that you were carrying a large sum in Government money."

"But they were terribly afraid of Senorita Bessie, girl though she is, and obeyed her far better than they would a master, for though left in charge of the ranch, I could do little with them, and they run things to suit themselves."

"I see, and then came up here to get you to aid them to put me out of the way?"

"Yes, senior, and they would not listen to my entreaties not to do so, for they said they could get plenty of money, and then run the herd of horses off and sell them, and never be caught."

"When they saw I was determined to warn you, they sprung upon me and of course I could do nothing with three powerful men, senior."

"I do not blame you, Pard Harry, and will not forget your kindness in this matter, and Buffalo Bill offered his hand and it was firmly grasped by the half-breed, whose face lighted up with pleasure."

CHAPTER XXIX.

ON THE TRAIL OF THE FUGITIVES.

WHEN the supper was eaten, Half-Breed Harry expressed his determination to go down to the gate and remain.

"I have the full place on my hands now, seniors, and will stay there, for the cattle and ponies cannot escape, and no one can cross the river to reach the house."

"I would be grateful if you would not tell of the affair here to-night, for if it was known that I was here alone there are plenty of men who would come to kill me and rob the place, you know."

"That is very true," Buffalo Bill remarked.

"Then the Deerters, you know, might make a dash here, for the place is known to be well supplied."

"It was always the senorita's wish that no one should know the number of cowboys here, and she implied that there were more than we had, knowing that it would keep off an attack either by outlaws or red-skins."

"The Border Belle is a very nice young lady, Pard Harry."

"Yes, Senor Bill, and so I would like it not to be known that I am here alone."

"We will keep the secret, Pard Harry, never fear, but now we will get what rest we can, and we will spread our blankets here."

"You can go into the house if you wish, seniors."

"No, I have had enough of slide doors."

"By the way, what was that door built that way for?"

"It was an idea of the Senorita Bessie, senior, for the spare room was once used as a store-room, and the cowboys were always stealing provisions from it, so she put that door in, which they could not enter, for the present store-room was the piazza then."

"I see; now we'll start on the trail of sleep, Half-Breed Harry, for there are two men to be buried in the morning, and another to be caught and hanged," said Buffalo Bill.

"I only hope that you will catch Pony Pete, Senor Bill, for he is a very bad man," said the half-breed, and he wended his way down to the stockade while the three scouts threw themselves upon their blankets before the kitchen fire, and were soon fast asleep, unmindful of the two dead forms lying so still over in the corner near them.

When dawn broke the half-breed appeared, wood was thrown upon the fire and the breakfast was cooked.

Then the two bodies were wrapped in blankets and consigned to a grave a short distance away, Buffalo Bill first taking from the form of one of the men his coat and hat.

"I will leave my horse here, Half-Breed Harry, and ride the one at the cowboys' cabin, for he appears to be a fine animal," said Buffalo Bill.

"He is, senior, and belonged to Toby whom we just hired, and whose coat and hat you have."

"Toby looked something like you, Senor Bill."

"So I thought myself, Harry."

"But he was not so handsome."

"Thank you."

"There was a striking resemblance, Bill, at a casual glance," Surgeon Powell remarked, while Texas Jack added:

"Only as Harry here says, he was not near so handsome."

"And thank you, Jack."

"I really feel complimented, for it struck me that Toby, as Half-Breed Harry calls him, had about as hang-dog, ugly a mug as I have seen in many a day."

"But he had his mustache and gontee trimmed like yours, and his long hair, senior, and used to feel proud when the boys called him Buffalo Bill's twin," Half-Breed Harry explained.

"Well, I shall use the resemblance for all it is worth, and that is why I took his coat and hat, for they are out of the usual run, and will have the benefit of his horse, too."

"So you will start upon the trail of Pete, senior?" quickly asked the half-breed.

"Oh, yes, and I shall find him at the end of it," was the confident reply of the scout, who then secured from the half-breed what provisions he would need for some days, and putting his saddle and bridle upon the horse of the dead cowboy Toby, said to Surgeon Powell:

"You and Jack will go back to the fort now, I suppose, Doc, and will you please tell Colonel Loyal just the situation, but have it kept a secret for the present?"

"Oh, yes, it would be the best thing to do, as Half-Breed Harry would get into trouble if it was known that he was here alone," answered the surgeon.

The three scouts now bade good-by to Half-Breed Harry, Surgeon Powell promising to ride over to Ranch Isle in a couple of days to see how he was getting along, and Buffalo Bill telling him that he would return there on his way back from trailing Pony Pete, and get his own horse.

In all the conversation the three comrades had gleaned no knowledge of a suspicious nature from him, regarding the dwellers at Ranch Isle.

Miss Bessie Bond was the apparent mistress of the ranch, and her mother never interfered.

The ranch was kept under perfect discipline, and something in the past lives of the mother and daughter had caused them to be content to seek an asylum upon the border, where they would never be known or interfered with.

This was the surmise of Half-Breed Harry,

and more about them he did not know, or professed not to do so.

Half-Breed Harry lowered the massive gate after the three horsemen as they rode out, and then the eyes of the three fell upon the fresh trail of the fugitive cowboy.

Half a mile from the stockade it wound away to the left, and here Buffalo Bill parted with his comrades as he went off upon the trail of the fugitive.

CHAPTER XXX.

HIS LAST CAMP.

"How far will you follow the trail, Bill?" asked Surgeon Powell, as Buffalo Bill held out his hand at parting.

"To the end of it, Doc."

"It may lead to Mexico."

"Then to Mexico I go."

"Don't you want company?"

"Oh, yes; but it would not be well for us both to go, for this is a secret trail we are on, you know."

"Well, send back word from some of the posts if you keep on beyond limits, for if I do not hear from you in reasonable time, I will start on your trail."

"All right, Doc," and with a wave of the hand Buffalo Bill rode on, leaving the surgeon and Texas Jack to go to the fort.

The trail was a good one, made by two horses, one in the lead.

It was fresh, not more than seven hours old, and Buffalo Bill was glad to note by the tracks, every sign of which he read as though from a book, that neither of the horses led readily.

There was a trace of where one horse hung back, and then where the fugitive had changed to the other one, hoping that he would do better.

But these tracks showed that he had led no better than the other.

"If he does not drop one of his horses I'll catch him within twenty-four hours," the scout muttered to himself.

He was very glad to see that the horse he rode was an excellent one.

He possessed bottom as well as a rapid traveling gait, and went along at a good pace for overhauling the animals he was following.

"They were going about five miles an hour, I take it from their tracks, and I am making all of seven, and this animal can keep it up," said the scout.

He spared his horse all he could, dismounting and walking up and down hill, over rugged ways and watering him frequently as he crossed the streams.

He halted just half an hour at noon, and another half-hour later on.

When night was settling down he entered a narrow valley.

"If I recall aright this valley is twenty miles long, and no branching-off places."

"I cannot see the trail but I can hold on to the end of the valley and camp then, so if my man has halted for the night he will pass me in on the morrow, for I can wait for him."

"I can gain by doing this, so, good horse, we'll hold on and camp later."

This he did and it was ten o'clock when he camped at the end of the valley.

Caring well for his horse he threw himself upon his blankets to sleep, but awoke just as he wished to, an hour before dawn.

He cooked breakfast, for he was off the trail where the light of the fire could not be seen, and bridling and saddling his horse was ready with the first streak of light that enabled him to discover a track.

"He has not passed; but he did enter the valley, that is certain."

"I will go upon the back trail," said the scout, and he rode back up the valley.

Just as the sunlight fell over the mountain-tops into the valley, he saw the trail.

It branched off toward the left, to where there was a cliff, some heavy timber and a small stream.

"Ah! he has camped yonder, has he?"

"He rises late for a fugitive, or maybe he did not think I would take the trouble to follow him."

With this the scout rode on toward the timber.

He halted at the edge, made his horse fast to a tree and then went forward on foot.

He knew his danger if his coming had been discovered.

But he had put on the hat and coat of the man he had left in his grave back at Ranch Isle, and who did resemble him considerably.

"I better take full chances," he said, and going back he mounted his horse and rode boldly forward.

After riding a short distance he called out loudly:

"Ho, Pard Pete, whar is yer?"

At first there was no answer, but soon there came, after several hails had been given, a faint answer.

At once the scout rode on, and as he did so found two horses staked out, and not far away a camp-fire.

Lying near it was Pony Pete, and he called

out in a faint voice, as he saw, as he supposed, his comrade:

"Ho, Toby, I thought that Buffalo Bill had done for you as he did for me, for I has got it hard, I tell yer.

"I is awful glad yer has come, pard."

Buffalo Bill saw that the man was lying prostrate upon his blankets, and that he was suffering from the wound he had received he knew.

Staking his horse out the scout made a flank movement, and came upon the prostrate man, who said:

"Yas, pard, I is awful glad you has come."

"See here, Pony Pete, I am not your Pard Toby, but Buffalo Bill."

"Oh, Lord! I'm done fer," he groaned, and then quickly added:

"But you wouldn't kill a wounded man, Buffalo Bill?"

"No, that is not my nature, for, on the contrary, I will do what I can to help you."

"I wish now Surgeon Powell had come along, for he might have saved you."

"Saved me to hang, oh, no!"

"Let me hand in my chips from the wound, for I don't want to hang."

"Are you really so badly wounded, pard?" gently asked the scout.

"It was you who done it, and you ought to know."

"I fired by guess-work in the dark."

"You is a mighty good guesser then, for yer struck me whar I live."

"Where are you wounded?"

"Right here," and the man placed his hand upon his side.

"I got it there, though it did not hurt at first, and I didn't think it was much, for I was able to run to the cabin, pack up and get away."

"But it pained me more and more, and last night I camped early and this morning was unable to go on my way."

"I was awful glad when I saw you, for I thought you was Toby, Buffalo Bill, although I had seen him fall as we ran out of the house and thought he was hard hit."

"I will be as kind to you, Pony Pete, as your pard would have been; but I must tell you that I fear your wound is fatal," said Buffalo Bill impressively.

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE END OF PONY PETE'S TRAIL.

THE kindly manner of Buffalo Bill touched the wounded man, for he said:

"I guess it's my last camp, Buffalo Bill, the end of my life trail."

"I fear it is, Pony Pete; but I will do all in my power to help you."

"You won't leave me, for I don't want to die alone like a dog, for dogs go off alone to die, Buffalo Bill."

"So I have heard; but you are a human being, Pony Pete, and though we were foes, we are friends now, for I never hold enmity against a wounded man."

"And yet I die by your hand, Buffalo Bill?"

"Yes, as I would have died by yours, if you had found me in bed unconscious of your attack upon me, but I suspected treachery and was prepared for it."

"I don't know how it all occurred; but are my comrades dead?"

"Yes, one fell dead at my first shot, the other dropped out in the yard, and you have fallen here."

"It was a bad game for you to play, Pony Pete."

The man made no reply, and when he spoke after awhile the scout noticed that his mind was wandering, for he drifted far from the present back to the scenes of his boyhood.

Buffalo Bill was deeply moved, and sat by him, holding his hand.

He had placed a wet bandage over the wound, to check the steady flow of blood, and then awaited the moment when he knew that life must take its flight from the body.

At last Pony Pete spoke again, as though his mind had not wandered afar off:

"Yes, it was a bad game for us to play; but then Half-Breed Harry said it must be done."

"Who?"

"Half-Breed Harry, for he was boss at the ranch while the young missus was away."

"You lay the blame on Half-Breed Harry then?"

"Oh, yes, for it was long ago decided that you must die, and many a time your life has been in danger, only we wanted to make sure, for we knew you was a bad man if we didn't kill you at the first shot."

"And there was Doctor Powell, the Surgeon Scout; he was to be killed also; and Texas Jack, too; for with you three men out of the way, we did not fear the other scouts much, and the army."

"But why want us out of the way, Peter?"

After a moment the answer came faintly:

"Because you was in our way."

"How?"

"I don't remember it all now; but orders went out to kill you. I guess my brain isn't just steady, pard."

"And you say that Half-Breed Harry was the man who set you upon me?"

"He was."

"Why, he was in irons when we found him."

"Yes, he would not lead us, but sent us, and when he saw how it ended, and heard the shouts of your comrades, he ran and put those irons on himself."

"Oh! pard, he is a clean rascal, that same Half-Breed Harry."

"Do you mean to tell me that the half-breed slipped those irons on himself, and arranged the gag for his mouth?" asked Buffalo Bill, in surprise.

"Oh, yes, he did just that, for it saved his neck, you see."

"And he was the instigator of the attack on me?"

"Yes— See! there he is now."

"Curse yer, Half-Breed Harry, for you are the one who brought me to this," and once more the mind of the dying man was wandering in delirium.

After a long while he had a lucid moment again, and the scout quickly asked:

"And did the Border Belle tell you to kill me?"

"I will not speak of her, Pard Bill. You catch and hang Half-Breed Harry; he is the man you are to strike—he and his half-brother."

"His half-brother?"

"Yes; don't you know him?"

"No; what is his name?"

"Why, you know him well, Buffalo Bill."

"What is his name?" repeated the scout quietly, though he was all eagerness to know.

"I have forgotten," and the man passed his hand wearily across his forehead, and once more began to ramble in his delirium back to his boyhood days.

The scout listened attentively, hoping he would hear some word as a further clue.

But, he did not, and again rallying, said:

"Catch Half-Breed Harry and hang him, Buffalo Bill, for that will break them up."

"Break who up?"

"The Deserters, of course, for you know the outlaws, don't you?"

"Oh, yes; and do you know them?"

"No; but Half-Breed Harry does."

In vain did Buffalo Bill try to learn more from the dying man.

He was as patient as an Indian, yet could hear nothing more excepting an occasional charge against Half-Breed Harry, which more and more seemed to be caused by hatred for him.

At last, with a sudden cry for help, and half-rising to his feet, Pony Pete fell back and expired.

Buffalo Bill could but be deeply impressed with the man's end, and it was some time before he seemed to feel himself again.

Then, shaking off the depression upon him, he dug a grave over in the bank of the brook, and wrapping the form in blankets, placed it decently in its last resting-place, which he covered with heavy rocks to keep off the wild beasts.

Then, as it was nearly sunset, he decided to remain encamped there for the night, and start early the next morning upon his return to Ranch Isle, for he wished to have a chat with Half-Breed Harry, after the charges he had heard against him from his dying comrade.

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE DENIAL.

HAVING heaped fresh fuel upon the camp-fire after dark, and his supper being disposed of, Buffalo Bill opened the traps of the dead cowboy, for he hoped to discover something therein which would give him a further clew to the mystery which he wished to solve.

The camp was in a niche of the cliff, and a good one, approachable only from one direction, and there was a grass plot near where the horses were placed, and he had them in full view.

The fire was not visible back among the rocks, and when it burned into a bright blaze Buffalo Bill sat down to his task of looking over the belongings of Pony Pete.

"I don't like this overhauling of a dead man's traps, but then I may strike something here to be of service to me," he said.

There were two heavy sacks, well filled, a pair of large saddle-bags and his saddle, bridle, blankets and weapons.

The bags contained clothing, and the scout was surprised at what he saw.

There was the buckskin suit of a scout, the uniform of a soldier, cap and all, a black coat and pants, which would have served a preacher well, top-boots, leggings and moccasins, with a Mexican dress, sombrero and all.

Then there were two masks, a couple of false beards and a wig of blonde hair, an officer's cloak and some other minor articles.

"Well! Pony Pete must have been an actor, from his wardrobe," muttered the scout.

"But as there are no theaters out here, these things were intended for disguises."

"I don't half-like these uniforms, for that is the way the outlaw band, known as The Deserters, dress."

"Can he have been one of the band?"

"There is no telling."

"Now to these saddle-bags."

These were overhauled and showed powder and ball, a pair of derringer pistols, a belt heavy with gold, and which had been evidently about the waist of the man when he was wounded, for it was stained with blood, still moist.

There was a buckskin bag of old jewelry, and among this was a lady's ring of considerable value, and containing the lettering:

"G. G. TO L. H., MAY 1ST, 18—."

Next to be discovered was a leather case containing some time-worn papers, and a map newly made, yet somewhat worn.

The map was well executed, and instead of lettering had secret signs here and there, but the scout knew the country well enough to understand it, for he said to himself:

"This is the very country that The Deserters work."

"This may be useful to me," and the scout wrapped himself in his blankets and sunk to sleep, with no superstitious dread of the dead form lying in his grave so near him.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE SCOUTS' RETURN.

THE scout started upon the back trail the next morning with a feeling that he had done his duty as far as it was possible.

He packed the traps of the dead cowboy upon the two horses and then tying them single file to lead, rode away from the camp with a glance at the rock-covered grave of Pony Pete and the remark in the way of musing:

"How sad a thing it is that we must take the life of each other."

"I wish it were otherwise."

Making an early start he expected to get to Ranch Isle by nightfall and remain there until the following day.

He wondered greatly at what the dying cowboy had said of Half-Breed Harry in his lucid moments, and yet could not but feel that he might have spoken as he did in delirium.

That was what bothered him.

Still he felt that the half-breed would bear watching and no harm come of it, while it might be of service in the end.

That it could have been as Pony Pete had said, he knew was possible though hardly probable.

He began to regard the half-breed more carefully in his mind's eye.

A man with a dark face, strangely black eyes, snow-white even teeth, small hands and feet and a form slender, yet graceful and sinewy.

He had a look of conscious power, and seemed like a man ever on his guard, never to allow himself to be rattled.

He dressed in a combination suit of Indian leggings, Mexican jacket of velvet, silk sash, and sombrero and high top cavalry boots, while he carried a long-bladed Mexican knife and a very handsome pair of revolvers.

At times he had the appearance of a Mexican gentleman, and yet he would take the bridle-rein of the scout's horse with the air of an acknowledged inferior and cook a meal as humbly as the lowest servant yet with the skill a *chef* might envy.

"The more I recall the man, the more assured I am that he will bear watching."

"Who can this half-brother of his be, whom Pony Pete spoke of? or was that also said in his delirium?"

Thus mused the scout as he rode along. He did not urge his horses, keeping up a steady gait which would accomplish by night the task he had set for them.

It was just after sunset when he came in view of the stockade wall at Ranch Isle.

He saw no one, and so rode up to the gate and leaped lightly over.

Just inside the cabin was Half-Breed Harry cooking his supper, and he had not observed the coming of Buffalo Bill, or his entrance.

With the bright light of the fire falling full upon his face, Buffalo Bill had an opportunity to regard him closely.

He saw in that swarthy face more than he had observed before. It was not an ugly face, and yet it was one to fear.

At last the scout slipped back into the shadow, and called:

"Ho, pard, where are you?"

A moment after a voice called from the shadows behind the cabin:

"Who calls?"

"A traveler who seeks a night's shelter."

"You cannot find it here, senor, for my family are down with the small-pox."

Buffalo Bill laughed and replied:

"You have caught the disease as quickly as you have found a family, Pard Harry."

"Ah! Senor Buffalo Bill!" cried the half-breed.

"Yes; I am back from my trail."

"You did not overtake Pony Pete then?"

"On, yes, I found him."

"Where is he, senor?" and Buffalo Bill dis-

cerned a trace of anxiety in the man's tone and manner.

"Raise your gate, pard, and I'll tell you all about it, for I expect you to entertain me to-night."

"Yes, senor. I was just preparing supper," and seizing the handle of the little windlass the half-breed drew the gate high enough for the scout to ride under.

"Ah! Pony Pete's horses!" he said, as he saw the two animals.

"Yes, I brought them back with me."

"And Pony Pete, senor?"

"Is a prisoner, with no hope of escape."

Buffalo Bill saw the start the man gave, for the firelight was in a line with him, and his voice was slightly changed as he repeated:

"A prisoner, senor?"

"You should have killed him, for he will escape, sure."

"I think not, Half-Breed Harry; but I will turn the horses loose, and I suppose mine is all right?"

"Yes, senor."

This was done, and as the half-breed aided the scout to bring in the traps, he said:

"I see you have the things of Pony Pete here?"

"Yes, and when we have had supper, I will tell you all about him."

The half-breed put on an extra allowance of food, and Buffalo Bill watched his face closely as he moved about.

But it was emotionless, and in the easiest manner possible he said:

"Now, senor, supper is ready."

The scout ate heartily, and when he had lighted his pipe suddenly said:

"Where is your half-brother now, Pard Harry?"

The man started in spite of his nerve, yet answered almost immediately:

"I have no brother, senor."

"I thought you had."

"No; I had a half-brother once who was hanged by the Vigilantes in Texas, and that is why I came here, for they sought my life, too; and yet, neither Leon nor myself were guilty of the crime they accused us of."

"It was the work of our foes, senor, to accuse us, and my brother suffered for that of which he was innocent, while I escaped at the last moment and came here to be chief of cowboys for the senorita."

"That is all there is to my life, senor," and the man's frank manner seemed to carry conviction with it in a way that set Buffalo Bill to pondering deeply.

Could it be possible that a dying man would take the leap in the dark with a lie on his lips?

Buffalo Bill could not believe that.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE ACCUSED.

"WELL, Pard Harry, I must tell you about my trail after your friend, Pony Pete," said the scout after a short silence.

"He is not my friend, now, for he has always been my foe."

"I have suspected him of being one who has caused me much of sorrow and suffering in my short life, for I have not yet lived thirty years, Senor Cody."

The man did not speak as would be expected of an Indian half-breed, but rather like one of education, and who had been reared in refined surroundings.

The more he saw of him the more Buffalo Bill was puzzled.

His manner had become gentle, almost pathetic now.

"Well, Pony Pete made severe charges against you."

"I do not doubt it, and it was he who spoke to you of my brother, senor."

"Yes; but he did not imply that he was dead."

"That is strange, for Pete saw him die at the rope-end."

"Well, he simply referred to him."

"And to me?"

"Yes."

"What lie did he utter against me, senor?"

"He said you had been the leader of the attack upon me."

At this the half breed laughed, revealing his milk-white teeth in doing so.

And yet it was not a laugh of merriment the scout thought, but a sardonic one, as if it were forced as a disguise.

"It seems to amuse you."

"It does."

"And why?"

"You found me in irons, senor?"

"Yes."

"You saw that I had managed to free myself of the gag in my mouth, but could not do more?"

"So it appeared."

"You heard my story?"

"Yes."

"Then how can you believe what that man, my foe, told you?"

"He said that my death had been determined

upon, that you had laid the plot to kill me while I was asleep, kill my horse and throw him in the river, bury my traps and never let it be known that I had been to Ranch Isle."

"Yes, senor, that was their plot."

"And he told me that you sent them, the three cowboys, to do the killing, and finding that they had failed, that my friends were near, you had yourself placed that gag in your mouth and slipped those irons on, first upon your feet, thrust through the rounds of a chair, and then snapped the manacles upon your wrists."

This time there was no mistaking the merriment of the half-breed.

He laughed loud, long and heartily.

At last he said:

"And Pony Pete said this, senor?"

"He did."

"He is trying to save his own neck at the expense of mine."

"Not at all!"

"You think not?"

"I know not."

"How so?"

"It was the confession of a dying man."

"Ah, senor!"

"True."

"Is he dead?"

"Yes."

"When did he die?"

"Yesterday."

"Where?"

"On the trail in his camp."

"You said that he was in prison?"

"His last prison, yes, the grave."

Again the half-breed started, but with the quick way he had of regaining his composure he said:

"And you killed Pony Pete, senor?"

"It was the shot did it that I gave him here, in the dark."

"Then the wound was fatal?"

"Yes."

"Yet he rode far?"

"He rode until he could go no further, so went into camp, but never left it alive."

"You found him then?"

"Just what I did."

"And he made a dying confession?"

"Yes, made a clean breast of the whole scheme."

"Which you believe, senor?"

"With a desire to do full justice by you, Half-Breed Harry, I will tell you that he was at times in delirium."

"The ravings of a fever-wrecked, crime-haunted man, were his utterances against me."

"It was in his lucid intervals that he spoke of you, Half-Breed Harry."

"I am sure not."

"Why?"

"Because he did not tell the truth."

"You assert this?"

"Yes, senor, with no fear of contradiction. The man was in delirium, or if not he said what he did as my bitter foe, to assure my death."

"It might be so."

"It is so, senor."

"Well, I give you the benefit of the doubt."

"You are kind, senor."

Buffalo Bill could not detect whether this was meant as honest thanks or in a sneering tone.

"Yes, I give you the benefit of the doubt," Half-Breed Harry.

Whether the man suspected the repetition of the question was to trap him or not, he did not repeat his words, but in silence held forth his hand as an appreciation of the scout's kindness.

"And you were good enough to bury Pony Pete, senor?"

"Yes, for I certainly would not leave his body for the coyotes to tear to pieces."

"Yet he sought your life, senor?"

"Oh, yes, but being dead killed all animosity I had felt toward him in life."

"Senor Cody?"

"Yes."

"If the Senorita Bond were only here she could tell you that I am to be trusted, that I am not the wicked man Pony Pete would have led you to believe through his dying utterances, but which you would not accept as proof against me even though spoken by lips that in a short while would be sealed forever."

"Senor, I thank you, and am your friend forever," and the face of the half-breed lighted up radiantly now, and Buffalo Bill seemed to feel that in thought he had really wronged him.

CHAPTER XXXV.

AN ACCIDENTAL DISCOVERY.

THAT night in the cowboys' cabin, at the stockade gate leading into Ranch Isle, Buffalo Bill slept as did the great Napoleon—"with one eye open."

He was constantly on the watch for the half-breed, for though trusting him in a measure he was yet suspicious of him, and did not intend to be caught napping.

The night passed, however, without any act on the part of the half-breed to add to the suspicion against him, and promising to return soon and bring back the horse he borrowed to

carry to the fort the traps of Pony Pete, Buffalo Bill mounted his own horse and set off upon the trail for the post.

He went by way of Skeleton Gap, to cut off the distance of several miles, and had just reached the rock-covered grave of the massacred emigrants, when he beheld a horseman approaching.

A glance showed him that it was Surgeon Powell, and the two urged their horses to a more rapid pace, and greeted each other most cordially.

"I was just on my way to Ranch Isle, Bill, to see Half-Breed Harry."

"I just left him this morning, Doc, for I stayed there last night."

"Is he still alone?"

"I saw nothing to cause me to believe to the contrary."

"And you appear to have struck it rich," and Surgeon Powell glanced at the horse bearing Pony Pete's traps.

"That is Pony Pete's outfit, and the horse I borrowed from Half-Breed Harry, as he said the Belle of Ranch Isle owned all the animals her cowboys rode."

"That means that you caught up with Pony Pete?"

"Yes."

"Peace to his ashes," solemnly said the surgeon.

"Yes, he is dead and under ground; and the wound I gave him that night was the cause."

"I will tell you about it."

The two sat down upon the rocks, forming the cross over the emigrants' graves, and Buffalo Bill told his story of the trail he had followed:

Then he asked:

"Now, Frank, what do you make out of it?"

"Well, the dying man said some truths without a doubt, for he did not say enough to prove that he was speaking from venom against the half-breed."

"Had such been the case he would have said more, and shown a vindictive determination to have you kill his enemy upon his confession alone."

"You think, then, that Half-Breed Harry is not as innocent as he professes to be."

"That is my belief."

"And will bear watching?"

"Every day and hour."

"He appeared to me to be honest."

"He is a very remarkable man, that half-breed, Bill, for he is an actor in all things, and he has far more intelligence than he would have men believe."

"Such is your opinion, Frank?"

"Candidly."

"Well, you reason well and no mistake."

"Now, let us overhaul Pony Pete's traps together, for we could not have a better place, and I want you to see just what is here."

"Did Half-Breed Harry know that you had these things?"

"Oh, yes, I told him."

"And did not want them?"

"Yes, he offered to buy them, for he said he was short of clothes."

"You would not sell?"

"No, though he said he would give me a hundred dollars for the outfit."

"Then they are worth more to us."

"There is a belt of gold in the saddle-bags containing three hundred dollars, and there is also a ring of some value."

"Did Half-Breed Harry know of these?"

"I think not, or at least he did not speak of them."

"But urged you to sell to him the outfit?"

"Yes, he was quite persistent in this."

"Well, we will see what he craved to the tune of a hundred dollars."

The bags were first opened, and the suits were laid out in order and as they belonged.

"Ah! a soldier suit, officer's cloak and cavalry hat for our army."

"Yes."

"And other clothes, too—the fellow was a pawnbroker, Bill."

"I suspected him of being an actor, Doc."

"Well, I guess you are near right, for I suspect that he did play different parts."

"But see; this Mexican suit is an elegant one, though it has been worn."

"Yes, it is a handsome one."

"Bill?"

"Yes, Frank."

"This suit I have seen before."

"Ah!"

"It was worn by Captain Leon Luiz, the Mexican Lancero, the day of the tournament at Ranch Isle."

"It looks like it."

"It is the suit, for I recognize the way this gold lace is put on, and more: here is a snag in the shoulder he got that day."

"Then Pony Pete stole it from him."

"No, I guess he gave it to him, for Captain Luiz was too much of a dandy to wear a torn suit."

"I wonder if he left anything in the pockets?"

With this Surgeon Powell thrust his hands into the different pockets, and at last drew from one a small red book in pamphlet form.

The book was in Spanish, and as Surgeon Powell spoke the language he said:

"It is a roster of the Mexican Army: yes, dating back for five years, Bill, from the present time."

"Now we will see the name of Captain Leon Luiz, and his proper rank— By Heaven! it is not here Bill!" and the Surgeon Scout seemed really excited, so different from his usual perfect calm.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

DEAD OR ALIVE.

THE exclamation and words of Surgeon Powell came to Buffalo Bill with their full force when the doctor said:

"Remember, Bill, the name of Captain Leon Luiz is not here, and yet he was introduced as being in the Mexican Army, a captain of Lancers."

"He even told me that his command was known as the Lariat Lancers, from the fact that all of his men carried lassoes and were skilled in throwing the rope."

"Perhaps, Doc, he has resigned, and is an ex-officer?"

"Then he should have said so, Bill."

"How far back did you say the roster went?"

"Five years."

"Maybe his name is further back?"

"Ah, it might be, but as an ex-officer he should not have represented himself as one now in service."

"Very true."

The surgeon now ran over the names for each year and he said:

"Not last year, nor the year before."

"Or in the other two years?"

"Not in the fourth."

"And the fifth?"

"Yes, here is his name, or a part of it."

"Yes."

"I'll read you what it says here:

"Leon Luiz Alvarez, captain of Lasso Lancers; entered service January 1st, 18—, as second lieutenant graduating at the English military school for cadets with high honors."

"Promoted to first lieutenant for gallant conduct upon the field in the Juarez Maximilian war, and again promoted on the field for distinguished bravery to rank of captain."

"Executed June 1st, 18—, for conspiracy against the Government."

"At his execution he was granted the privilege he asked to give the order for the men to fire upon him."

"So perish all traitors to Mexico."

After reading this note in the roster, Surgeon Powell gave a sigh which was echoed by Buffalo Bill, and both were silent with their thoughts for awhile.

"It is a pity, Bill," said Surgeon Powell, breaking the silence, "to see a man with such a brilliant record end his life as a conspirator."

"It certainly is; but can there be no mistake, doctor?"

"How so?"

"Is that our man?"

"Beyond doubt."

"The name there is Alvarez."

"Yes."

"And his was Leon Luiz."

"True, Leon Luiz, and here is Alvarez added in this book."

"What company of Lancers did he say he belonged to?"

"The Lasso Lancers."

"And he was educated in England?"

"Yes."

"He certainly spoke English well."

"Yes, with great purity."

"And you believe that Captain Luiz and the one there named are the same?"

"I do."

"But, Alvarez was executed."

"True."

"How could that be, then?"

"Mexico is a strange country, Bill, and the Mexicans a strange people."

"The very men who fired upon him may have been secretly his way of thinking, as well as the officer in charge of the execution squad."

"In such case the guns could have been loaded only with powder, the captain fell at the fire, and thus be saved, for the affair was doubtless at sunset and darkness coming on aided the deceit."

"You make a strong case of it, doctor."

"And then, you remember, Don Eduardo told Madge that he was going back to Mexico, to be tried for a crime of which he was innocent."

"So he did."

"And that Captain Luiz was taking him back?"

"Yes."

"And the fair Bessie was going, to become the wife of the Mexican captain?"

"All true."

"Now it might be that Don Eduardo could prove the captain guiltless of the crime, and when they got back to Mexico all would be serene and the Mexican be made happy by a pardon and a wife."

"You have made a strong case of it, Doc,

and I am almost inclined to believe there is something in it, after all."

"There may not be, but I am supposing the case from the fact of the name, of what Don Eduardo said, and the finding of this roster in the pocket of the suit that belonged to Captain Luiz, while you see that it is marked all around with black."

"That is true; but now to the ring and the map I have to show you."

The ring was handed over, and glancing at the inside Frank Powell said quickly:

"G. G. to L. H."

"Yes."

"Now G. G. can stand for Granger Goldhurst, and you remember in the papers found in the wallet given up to you was the name of Lucille Hubbard, which was doubtless that of the wife of the Englishman?"

"Doctor, you have a very clear way of looking through things, and you should have been a lawyer—no, that would have spoilt a very fine surgeon and a first-class scout, besides depriving me of my best friend, for there is no use out here for a lawyer. This ring may be of value."

"Without doubt, Bill; but now to the map."

The map was next unfolded and looked at, but no more could be made of it than that the Surgeon Scout also recognized it as the field of operation of the outlaw band of Deserters.

Then the traps of the dead cowboy were put away again, and mounting, the two comrades started for the fort, neither of them seeing a face peering down from the cliff above, and which both would have given much to have discovered.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

OF THE SAME OPINION.

THE chief of scouts rode into the fort by the side of Surgeon Frank Powell, and leading the horse bearing the traps of Pony Pete.

They went at once to Buffalo Bill's quarters, where the things were securely put away; after which the scout went to Colonel Loyal to report.

"Well, Cody, back again, I see, and I suppose you have news, as I saw you bring in a riderless horse," remarked the colonel in his cordial way.

"The horse belonged, sir, to a man I followed from Ranch Isle, and which Surgeon Powell reported to you, I believe."

"Yes, Cody, and I think you were foolhardy to go as you did into such danger, for I am sure you anticipated it."

"I did not know what to expect, colonel, but I sought to find out."

"And did?"

"Yes, sir."

"You were wise to have Surgeon Powell and Jack Omohundro near."

"I was certainly glad of it, sir; but I have asked that the affair be kept secret for the present."

"It is best that it should be so; but did you catch your man?"

"Yes, sir."

"And saved the hangman trouble?"

"He was dying, sir, when I found him, and from the wound I had given him the night before."

"I will tell you, sir, just what he said to me, and you can advise me as to your views."

"Do so, Cody, for this is growing interesting in the mystery attached to that ranch and its people."

The scout told the story of Pony Pete's death, and all that he had said, and made known the contents of the man's outfit, banding him the ring, map and the red book.

"Surgeon Powell will be here soon, sir, to read you just what that book says, for I believe I heard you say once that you do not speak Spanish."

"No, that part of my education was neglected, I am sorry to say—oh! here is Powell, now."

The Surgeon Scout entered, and soon read what was in the red book.

"I agree with you, Powell, that the man who was here was the same one who is here reported as executed. It is a mixed-up affair all around, and after all it may turn out that the mystery is for some good."

"But the attack on me, colonel?"

"Ah, yes, that looks bad, yet it might have been a stroke of the cowboys' to get money."

"Or get rid of Bill, colonel?"

"Yes, Surgeon Powell, that may be it; but now to the ring you spoke of and the map."

They were placed in his hands, and after glancing at the inscription in the ring, he said:

"There is no doubt but that this ring was the property of Granger Goldhurst's wife, and I only wish it had been found before the departure of our English friends."

"The map I am at sea about, and as for the wardrobe you speak of as belonging to the cowboy, it may have been used for disguises, and perhaps not."

The discussion was continued for some time, and it was agreed that the affair at Ranch Isle should be kept a close secret, at least for the present, or until the return of Mrs. Bond, and her daughter, if the latter returned.

That they had deserted their comfortable home could not be believed, and so it was supposed that Mrs. Bond at last would come back, and then she should know all that had occurred.

How the ring of Granger Goldhurst came into the possession of Pony Pete, not one of the three could offer an opinion.

"And did the man, Half-Breed Harry, say aught about Don Eduardo Vincente, Cody?"

"No, sir, he seemed to know nothing about him."

"Well, I learn that his man, Dandy Dan, has been gambling very heavily since the Don left, and it struck me that he might have gotten hold of some of his master's funds, and was using them."

"I will drop in at Emerald Ed's saloon, sir, and take a look at him," said Buffalo Bill.

"Do so, and see just what the fellow is at out, for somehow I think he is an unmitigated rascal."

"I think you have read him right, Colonel Loyal," answered Buffalo Bill, and soon after he took his leave of the colonel, leaving in his hands the ring, the red book and Pony Pete's belt of gold.

The scout made his way from the colonel's quarters to the house of the chaplain, and Mustang Madge met him at the door.

"Well, Papa Bill, give an account of yourself for the past few days," said the pretty girl, pleasantly.

"That is just what I have called for, my little detective pard, and I wish to get that wise head of yours to give me an opinion of what I tell you," and Madge heard the story of the scout's adventures, after which she said:

"I'll reserve my opinion until another time; but I may say now that I do not think it wise for you to go alone to the Ranch Isle, for if Half-Breed Harry is not a villain then he belies his looks, that is all."

"Somehow all of us are of the same opinion, Miss Madge," answered Cody.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

TRAPPER DENNIS.

WHEN Buffalo Bill returned to his quarters he found there a visitor awaiting him, a man with long iron-gray hair and beard, and his complexion was brown as a berry, and as tough as leather.

He was dressed in a suit of buckskin, a slouch hat and moccasins.

"Trapper Dennis!" cried Buffalo Bill, stepping quickly forward and grasping his hand.

"Yes, Boy Bill, it's what is left of old Trapper Dennis, bad luck to him," was the answer.

"Why, you haven't gone back on yourself, pard, have you?"

"Waal you shall hear ef I has, Bill, fer thet is why I have come."

"I thought you were rolling in wealth, living in luxury amid the nabobs of the East."

"See here, Bill, no nabobs for me, and as for the East, I hev been ter Chicago and thet cured me o' ther land toward ther rising sun."

"What has happened, old man?"

"Has yer something to drink in yer lay-out, and a bit of grub, for I'm both thirsty and hungry?"

"You shall have both, Dennis, and a good place to sleep too."

"When I gits ther moss out o' my throat, and fills ther vacuum under my belt I'll talk to yer, Bill."

The scout knew the old man, so the drink was brought forth, and supper followed it, and Trapper Dennis did full justice to both.

Then he lighted his pipe and taking an easy-chair placed for him by the scout, he said:

"Yer said yer thought I were rolling in luxuries in ther East, Bill?"

"Yes, I certainly thought so, for you had given up trapping when I saw you last, and intended to go East and see the world."

"I seen it."

"Not much in the short time you were away."

"I tell yer I has seen it all; I has been there, rolling in luxury, and in ther gutter as well."

"Bill, I was a chromo, and, oh, my! what a town that Chicago be."

"I have heard so."

"Don't go thar, Bill, or yer'll lose yer grip on life, for it are ther dog-gondest place I ever seen."

"What happened to you there, old man?"

"Yer knows I had my money saved up and it were in ther banks."

"So you told me."

"Waal, I made some o' the nicest acquaintances I ever seen, and they showed me the town."

"And you live to tell it?"

"Waal I'm here, hain't I?"

"Yes."

"I has fought Ingins and grizzlies, catamounts, and wildcats, had a scrimmage now and then with a pale-face, fell down a mountain-trail side, got most drowned several times, but living in Chicago lays over any game I ever played."

"I tell ye, Pard Bill, it cost me a cool thousand, that night, for ther boys ter show me a

elephant, and I didn't git a shot at him arter all.

"Next day, or I 'spose it was, for I didn't keep no count of time, I bought me a suit o' clothes fine enough for a pulpit sharp, and then I bought a watch and chain, some dimants and gloves, and a hat as looked like a powder keg painted black.

"Then I went to ther theater and the gals all went gone on me.

"Ther feller as was my guide knew 'em all, and I give 'em a supper and the way ther wine flowed were a caution ter cats.

"Next night I tuk in ther gambling saloons, and I were up for heaps o' money.

"Waal, Bill, I were in ther swim, so they told me, and when I come ter count up one Sunday morning when I were ther sick I had ter send for a doctor, I found I had been robbed of my watch and dimants, my money and all.

"I jist had enough in bank fer seed, and so I tuk ther first train for ther land o' ther setting sun, and reaching the Overland husses I got a seat up with ther driver, and having bought a new outfit, got him ter put me down on ther trail whar I c'd strike out fer Massacre Valley and start out anew.

"I tell yer, Bill, I don't want no more Chicago in mine."

"Well, old man, I am glad to see you back again, though I am sorry you lost your money."

"Bill, it were a short racket, but a lightaing one and I 'spose I enjoyed it.

"I has seen that I shall never forgit, that ter think over when I are alone in my mountain-camp, for I didn't believe thar were sich sights in ther world.

"But it makes me love the mountains and plains more, and I tell you, pard, thar hain't ther danger a running out here, that thar be in ther towns.

"Yer kin shoot a b'ar, or a catamount, run from a Injun, but I'm darned ef yer kin ever git out o' ther way of them sharps in Chicago.

"Lordy, Bill, it are a great place, and durned ef I don't believe I got acquainted with ther hull town.

"I drank a bar'l o' rum, twice as much weak wine, eat a ton o' fancy truck, had jist twenty-one fights, two with niggers and one with a Chinese about a wash-bill, but I got my biled shirts all ther same, and ther heathen's scalp in the bargain—here it be, Bill, for I keeps it for luck," and the old trapper drew out of his pocket the long "pig-tail" of some unfortunate Chinaman.

"They pranced out a soldier with a club ter arrest me, but I jist put my fist inter his face and run fer it.

"And Lordy, Bill, yer sh'ud have seep me git up an' dust, but it's no use ter run thar, for they headed me off, corraled me and tuk me up before ther jedge, and I give him ther racket jist as it were.

"He were a prime good feller, for he borrowed ten dollars from me, got me ter buy ther Chinaman's pig-tail, and give the soldier with a club some money for next election, arter which he went out and we got drunk together.

"I tell you, Bill, Chicago are situated jist over Purgatory; but that hain't what I came here ter tell you, for I has news for yer," and the old trapper seemed very earnest now.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

THE TRAPPER'S STORY.

THE manner of old Trapper Dennis convinced Buffalo Bill that he had come to the fort for other motive than to tell him about his trip to Chicago.

He had enjoyed immensely the old man's story of his experience in civilization, and would have given much to have been with him.

But he sympathized with him in the loss of the little fortune he had laid up, though that did not appear to distress Trapper Dennis in the least.

"Well, old man, you have my sympathy in your loss of your money, and—"

"I enjoyed it, Bill, every dollar of it, 'cepting what I paid for the Chinaman's pig-tail.

"That went ag'in' me."

"I don't wonder, pard; but have you been trapping up toward Massacre Valley since you got back from your travels?"

"Just come from thar."

"I have been there since I saw you."

"I know it."

"Ab! and how?"

"Waal, I seen traces thar o' a row, and I know'd cavalry had got inter a scrape with ther red-skins."

"You are right, and we got corraled in Trapper's Mound."

"So I seen."

"And I played your little game."

"What were that?"

"I hoisted a signal on the tree, as you did."

"Was it answered?" eagerly asked the old trapper.

"It was."

"By the old hermit?"

"Yes, the White Spirit of the Mountains."

"And he helped you out?"

"He did, indeed."

"Good for him!"

"Have you seen him, pard?"

"No, Bill, nor could I find a trace of him, for I looked."

"And failed to find him?"

"I did."

"Why didn't you set your signal in the tree-top?"

"I did."

"And it was not answered?"

"No."

"Were you in any trouble when you set your signal?"

"No."

"That may be the reason."

"No, I fears the old man is dead."

"I hope not."

"So does I."

"But you said you had news for me."

"I has."

"Out with it then, Pard Dennis."

"Waal, I wants ter tell yer that while I was camped in the mountains I seen a man coming down ther trail."

"A white man?"

"Yes, but he looked like a cross between a nigger and a goat, for he were clad in skins, and burnt black almost, while his face were thin and sickly."

"He were so ill he could not have held up much longer, but he had escaped from the Sioux village and was fearful of being overtaken by the Injuns and tortured to death."

"I hailed him, and the poor fellow were so weak he tumbled down."

"So I went and helped him to my camp, fed him and gave him a leetle drink from my flask, for I allus carries a leetle pizen balm along fer fear o' snake-bites, Bill."

"Many snakes in Chicago, old pard?"

"Bill, it are a nest o' snakes, and they bit me nigh onter a thousand times."

"Well, what about your man in the mountains?"

"Ther rum and food helped him amazin', but I seen it were only temporary, fer he begun ter grow awful white in ther face."

"I got him ter talkin', and he told me as how he'd lived in Massacre Valley, and were there ther night o' ther killing."

"He said that a white man had led ther Sioux that night."

"A white man?"

"Yas."

"An accursed renegade."

"That's what he were."

"And he led the red fiends down upon that peaceful settlement?"

"That's what he did do, Bill."

"And this poor man?"

"Were one of the few as were taken prisoner, for nigh all others were killed."

"They kilt his folks, and war going ter torture him ter death, but a chief's daughter took a fancy to him and claimed him for her husband."

"Ther poor fellow war broken-hearted, but concluded he'd live for revenge, so made himself useful as best he could, hoping some day to escape and start upon the trail of revenge."

"Thus the years passed and his health began ter fail."

"While thar he got the names of all who were in the valley, men, women and children, and he wrote 'em all down."

"After each name he writ how they died, by massacre that night, or being tortured to death, or killed in the village, or died."

"He told me there war one family took away by ther white chief, and so he never seen 'em again, but hears they is still living up at the Head Village, and is held captives there."

"Did he give the names to you?"

"I has 'em all."

"With you?"

"Yes, I has his paper, writ by himself, and there is said ter be four captives in the Head Village, a settler, his wife, child and a young man."

"Ha! the name of this family, Dennis?" excitedly said Buffalo Bill.

"Goldhurst, I believes."

"Quick, old man, show me that paper!"

The old trapper did so quickly, and Buffalo Bill hand upon some paper torn from an old account-book.

Rapidly Buffalo Bill ran his eyes down the fateful list, and at last came to the following:

"Goldhurst—Granger."

"Lat' settler in the valley, and in excellent circumstances."

"Said to have been a miner and struck it rich."

"Had wife, named Lucille, and little daughter, name unknown."

"Also lived with him his wife's brother, Hugh Hubbard, a youth, and negro man and woman."

"Five cowboys on place."

"From all I can learn the Goldhurst family were spared by Evil Eye the Renegade White Chief, and taken to the Head Village of the Sioux."

"Last heard of them was three months ago, and they were still captives in the Head Village of the Sioux."

"Trapper Dennis, you have brought me news that will pay you well," cried Buffalo Bill grasping the old man's hand.

"We have struck the Lost Trail at last!"

CHAPTER XL.

TO HOLD A COUNCIL OF WAR.

THE excited manner of Buffalo Bill seemed to please the old trapper. He realized that he had brought him some very valuable news.

"I thought, Bill, as how I'd come to you, for I felt sorry for them poor people, and I didn't know but what you c'd work it so they'd git away."

"I can try, Pard Dennis, and I have just this to say to you, that there is money for you in a large sum, if the news you bring proves to be true, for there have been here of late two English gentlemen searching for this very man Goldhurst, a once member of his family."

"Well, they is there."

"You have only this paper as proof?"

"Waal, no, for I has a letter writ by ther lady, and it were given to a Injun who played her false, and did not take it through the lines, as he promised her."

"Here it is, for ther man I tells yer about got his squaw wife ter git it for him."

"It are badly worn, but I guesses yer kin read it."

He handed over, as he spoke, a small piece of paper, on which was written, in a fine feminine hand, but with apparently pale ink:

"TO ANY ONE WHO WILL SERVE THE UNFORTUNATE:

"Know that the family of Granger Goldhurst, settler of Pleasant Valley, are held as prisoners in the Head Village of the Sioux, the chief of which is Evil Eye, a renegade white man, who led the Indians the night of the massacre."

"In the name of Heaven we appeal for rescue from these red fiends."

"LUCILLE H. GOLDBURST."

There was no date, but nothing more was needed to have Buffalo Bill at once dispatch some of his men for Surgeon Powell and Captain Taylor, with a request for them to please come at once to his quarters.

It was not very long before they put in an appearance, and Frank Powell gave the old trapper a warm welcome.

Knowing the old man, he had to let him have his way, and tell his story as he pleased, which just meant his experience in painting Chicago a carmine hue.

The captain and surgeon laughed heartily at the recital, while old Dennis embellished greatly upon a second telling of it, but their faces became serious at once when he told of the escaped captive and the story he had to tell.

Then the fatal list was revealed, along with the letter of Lucille Goldhurst, and all were deeply impressed.

"And where is this man, this escaped captive, Mr. Dennis?" asked Captain Taylor.

"In his grave where he should be, sir."

"Why should he be there?"

"Because he's dead."

"Ah! a very good reason then, for having buried him, Trapper Dennis. But, when did he die?"

"One week ago."

"Where, may I ask?"

"In my camp in the mountains, sir."

"Tell us about it, old man," said Buffalo Bill.

"There's little to tell, Bill, for as I said he were a mighty sick man, and I know'd he c'dn't last long."

"He seemed to give up entire after meeting me, and slipped right out o' life."

"I didn't recomember no prayers, but I axed him if as how he'd like ter hear me sing ther Doxology, which I did recomember, and he seemed so tickled that I cleared the cobwebs o' forty year out o' my throat, got down on my prayer bones, ter make it more impressive, and set ter work."

"I tell yer, pards, he didn't live through ther Doxology, and I bev thought as how he died quick ter keep from hearing me sing it through, for somehow I didn't do myself justice, and I did hear him say, 'Thank God!' and I guess it was when he found that he c'd skip out and not hear it all."

"I buried him, pards, in a leetle place as would hev pleased him, hed he seen it, and I bundled up ther leetle he had and come ter see Buffalo Bill about them poor people up in the Sioux village."

"Now, pards, yer knows it all."

"Yes, Dennis, and we owe you thanks, for your coming," said Captain Taylor.

"There hain't no thanks yer owes me, for I is but human, and I feels for even a Injun in trouble, so I wants them people saved, I do."

"It's an ill wind, it is said, trapper, that blows no good to come one, so you see if you had not had your racket in Chicago and lost all your money, we would never have heard of these people, and that poor fellow you aided would have died all alone in the wilderness," Dr. Powell remarked.

"You is right, P-ard Doctor; but what a almighty racket it war."

"I'll never be lonesome so long as I live ag'in, for I'll be a-thinking how I went it in Chicago."

"I kin just see myself now at the supper I give, with a theater gal on each arm, a-dancin' a hop-down, to ther tune o' Old Dan Tucker—whoop! houp-la! set 'em up ag'in! but I were merry," and the old trapper shouted as he recalled his Chicago experience.

"You have a little red paint left yet, I see, trapper," Dr. Powell remarked.

"Yes, a leetle, but durned leetle; but what's to be did, for I'm on the rampage for them poor people, and I says hold a council of war."

"Yes, we must at once decide what is best to be done, Cody, so let us adjourn to the colonel's quarters and let him hear the story of Trapper Dennis."

"No, cap'n, don't let me tell him about Chicago, for I don't want him ter consider me a giddy old fool, while I is."

"I must stand well with the colonel."

"All right, we will not discuss your Chicago experience, trapper, but tell of the man you aided, and what he told you," and Captain Taylor led the way to headquarters.

CHAPTER XLII. THE STORY RETOLD.

THERE are no men who enjoy a little fun more than those whose lives are passed in daily danger of death, and soldiers on the eve of battle will have their jokes and pleasure.

In spite of being most decidedly serious when duty demanded it, Buffalo Bill was perfectly well aware that if old Trapper Dennis went to the colonel's quarters there would be what he facetiously called a "picnic."

"Old Dennis has a horror of appearing before the colonel, Cody, but I'll wager ten to one that he warms up and tells his experience," whispered Captain Taylor to Buffalo Bill, as they walked behind Surgeon Powell and the old trapper.

"You can get no bet out of me, captain, for it's going to be a picnic," Cody responded.

In the mean time, Powell was putting in a bid for his fun.

"I say, old man, you must not let the colonel think you are trying to hide anything from him, for of course he is posted."

"He knows you made a little fortune out of pelts and went East to live, and you should explain to him why you did not get beyond Chicago."

"Does yer mean it, Doc?"

"Certainly I do, Trapper."

"Shall I give him a talk on my racket?"

"By all means."

"What'll he think?"

"He'll think the worse of you if he sees you are trying to lie in ambush."

"I guesses you knows, Doc."

"Of course I do."

"Then he gets the racket."

"That is right, and do not try to hide anything from him."

"Not a word, Doc, if you says so, and think he won't put me in the guard-trap."

"He might, if he caught you trying to keep anything from him."

"I'm on ther trail then fer scalps, Doc," and the old trapper was just checked in uttering a war-whoop which would have brought the garrison at a run to arms.

The colonel was enjoying his after-dinner smoke, and chatting with Lieutenant Orey Onderdonk, who had just been appointed to his staff as an *aide-de camp*.

He greeted his visitors in his usual cordial manner, and though accustomed to the "characters" of the border, could not but smile when he beheld Trapper Dennis.

Of Irish parentage, there was just a slight accent of Erin in the brogue of the trapper, and all of an Irishman's love of fun.

The colonel had been "toasting" his new *aide*, and the decanter was on the table by him, so he ordered more glasses and invited his visitors to join him.

"Now for fun," muttered Surgeon Powell, and in passing some wine, from a glass, he slyly mixed brandy with it, with a wink at Buffalo Bill, and the remark that it would oil his tongue.

Then the trapper took the glass and it disappeared with one swallow, with a—

"Here's at yer, colonel, and may ye die with yer boots on as becomes a soldier."

"The same to you, Trapper Dennis," answered the colonel, enjoying the remark of the old trapper hugely.

Captain Taylor explained the situation, and said that Trapper Dennis had a very remarkable story to tell of his discovery in the mountains.

"I thought you had gone East, Mr. Dennis, for Cody so informed me."

"Bless God I did, sir, but I've come West now to stay—no more East for me, says I."

"You did not like the East then, trapper?"

"Yes, sir, for a while."

"I staved as long as my red paint lasted, and then come home."

The colonel saw by the looks of the party who had brought the trapper to his quarters that there was something for him to tell, and he determined to let the old man tell it in his own way, so he said:

"Well, trapper, I shall be glad to hear all that you have to say."

"He can no more keep from telling of his Chicago racket than he could killing an Indian," whispered Cody to Frank Powell.

Thus urged by the colonel Trapper Dennis began at the beginning.

He told of his Indian fights, the pelts he had saved up, the money he laid by in the banks, and his starting East.

Then he warmed up and the colonel had it from Alpha to Omega.

"Your throat is dry, trapper, so take a little wine," said the colonel once, when he saw the old man was getting a little husky.

Doctor Powell gave him brandy, and that set the tongue in rapid circulation again.

That the scene was as funny as could be was evidenced by the roars of laughter coming from the colonel's quarters, for the commander enjoyed it as hugely as did his officers, and the sentinel outside crept nearer to see what it was all about and told the story over again to his comrades at the guard-house that night.

As a *raconteur* Trapper Dennis was a success, and having heard him talk themselves, Colonel Loyal appreciated the intention of his officers and the scout for bringing the old man to tell his story to him in his own peculiar way.

At last the trooper concluded his experience in Chicago and came down to the sad tale of the man he had met in the mountain.

His voice grew pathetic then, and all listened to the recital of his scene with the dying man in his lonely camp, and of the story he had to tell of the captives then in the Indian camp.

CHAPTER XLIII. THE RECALL.

WHEN Colonel Loyal heard the trapper's story of just why he had come to the fort, he praised him for his humanity, and told him that steps should be at once taken to see what could be done to rescue the unfortunate captives.

Then he said:

"The best thing I can think of to do first, Trapper Dennis, is to engage you on liberal pay in the service of Lord Lonsfield and Sir John Reeder, and have you return to your trapping grounds at once, or rather start back in the morning."

"You shall be supplied with all you need, and I beg that you accept a repeating rifle from me, as it may come in useful to you."

"I will also let you have a horse, for you will need one—"

"I allus walks, colonel."

"Yes, but you will need to have a horse for quick work, and I wish you to take one with you, in fact two, one to carry your traps, and to be on hand in case an accident should happen to one of them."

"I c'd steal a couple of ponies from the Indians and save the expense."

"No, the expense will be gladly paid by the gentlemen I wish you to rescue, and Cody will select you two good animals."

"You have a camp, I have heard, which no one can find, so they will be safe."

"But you must agree upon a rendezvous with both Cody and Surgeon Powell, and in the meanwhile do all in your power to discover just what captives they have in the head Sioux village, and who this renegade chief is."

"I'll do it, colonel."

"If you can do so, get that remarkable man, the White Spirit of the Mountains, to help you, for he must have great influence with the Indians to cause them to obey him as they do."

"I'm afraid he's dead, colonel, for he never answered my signal."

"I hope not; but after all may he not be really the renegade chief referred to?"

"I never thought of that, sir."

"Well, look into anything connected with this affair, and be ready to report to my people when they come up into the mountains in a few weeks."

The old man promised and departed with Buffalo Bill, who was told to return to the headquarters after he had housed his guest for the night.

This he did, and found the colonel earnestly discussing the affair with his officers, Captain Taylor, the Surgeon Scout and Lieutenant Onderdonk.

"Well, Cody, that is the most original character I ever had the pleasure of meeting."

"I thank you for the treat you gave me, outside of the important news he brings."

"It certainly is important news, sir, for it contradicts the statement made by the White Spirit of the Mountains, that he saw Mr. Goldhurst die."

"Yes; yet he had the ring and wallet, the will of Goldhurst."

"True, sir; but it is all a mystery that needs clearing up."

"You think, then, that the news is sufficiently important to recall Lord Lonsfield and Sir John Reeder?"

"By all means, sir."

"I am glad to have you say so, for that was my opinion, and also Captain Taylor, Surgeon Powell and Lieutenant Onderdonk think the same, so that of those who have known the whole situation clear through, we are unanimous in the opinion that the gentlemen most interested should be recalled."

"I was going to suggest, sir, that you send Texas Jack with a dispatch to the Pony Express

Station, to be wired from the nearest telegraph office, for a letter might not head them off before they sail from New York."

"I am glad you spoke of this, for I intended writing; but I will, at once, write a dispatch and start your man with it to-night."

Turning to his table the colonel hastily wrote:

"HEADQUARTERS FORT BEAUVOIR,
July 1st, 18—."

"TELEGRAPH OPERATOR,

"Omaha, Neb.:—"

"Send the following through for me with all dispatch, and forward answer by Pony Express to Overland Stage Station where courier awaits it."

"LOYAL,"

"Colonel Commanding."

"To LORD LUCIEN LONSFIELD and

"SIR JOHN REEDER,

"Barrett House,

"Long Acre,

"NEW YORK CITY."

"Trapper Dennis arrived at fort to-night bringing most important news of captives in Head Village of Sioux."

"After consultation with my officers, we agree unanimously that you should return with all dispatch."

"I will have escort ready to place at your command."

"Trapper Dennis returns at once to Massacre Valley, and Buffalo Bill and Surgeon Scout ready to pick up the trail."

"Your friends here send their regards."

"My courier awaits answer at Overland Stage Station."

"LOYAL."

With this dispatch in his hand Buffalo Bill departed at once for the scout's quarters, and soon after Texas Jack was riding through the darkness on his way to the Overland Stage Station where the Pony Express could be reached.

The next morning, bright and early, Trapper Dennis set forth for Massacre Valley.

He was mounted upon a good horse, and led another carrying a good supply of provisions, while he was as pleased with his repeating rifle as a boy with a toy gun.

Before leaving the old trapper, Buffalo Bill and Surgeon Powell had agreed upon certain places of rendezvous in the mountains after a certain date.

CHAPTER XLIII. THE DECISION.

IN a pleasant parlor of the Barrett House in New York City, sat Lord Lonsfield and Sir John Reeder, reading letters from home.

"Well, John, we must get our steamer tickets to-morrow, and sail Saturday," said Lord Lonsfield.

"Yes, and have this affair settled, though I would like to remain longer in the United States, for I am charmed with the American people."

"As I am.—Come in!"

The last was in answer to a knock at the door.

A bell-boy entered, with the remark:

"A telegram, sir."

Lord Lonsfield glanced at the superscription, and said:

"It is addressed to both of us, Sir John."

Then he opened and read it, passing it in silence to Sir John.

"We will go at once," was the comment of Sir John, when he had read it.

"By all means."

"Any answer, sir?"

"I will ring when I need you," was the reply, and the boy having left the room, the two friends and kinsmen discussed the dispatch received by them from Colonel Loyal.

"This is dated day before yesterday at the fort, and Colonel Loyal pushed it through with all dispatch," said Lord Lonsfield.

"Yes, and he is not the man to send it unless there were urgent reasons for his doing so."

"No, he has news that Granger Goldhurst is still alive."

"Beyond a doubt."

"Well, what answer shall we make?"

After some further conversation, the following was sent:

"To COLONEL LOYAL,

"Commanding Fort Beauvoir,

"via Overland Trail."

"Many thanks for your dispatch just received."

"We appreciate your kindness and promptness, and take early morning Express for the West."

"Our remembrances to your military family."

"LONSFIELD,

"REEDER."

This dispatch was flying westward over the wires one hour after the colonel's telegram had been received.

The valet was called and ordered to have a carriage ready for the early Express, and pack up.

Then the two friends sat down for a chat over the news received.

"If it was unanimous, the opinion of our friends there, then I hold no doubt but important news has been received which upsets the testimony of that old hermit, Sir John."

"As do I, Lucien, and I would be a very happy man if we could find dear old Goldhurst still alive, though I would lose a title by it."

"He may have left an heir, if dead, Sir John."

"True; but all we can do is to conjecture, until we know the facts."

"Yes; and we will telegraph ahead and arrange for horses to carry us to the fort from the last station."

"Colonel Loyal will see to that, never fear."

"It would be asking a great deal."

"That is just what these Americans like to have us ask, if they can serve us in any way."

"That is true, for they are the most hospitable people in the world."

And so they talked until a late hour, consoling themselves that they would have all the time to sleep on the long run westward.

Bright and early the next morning they rolled out of New York, and in good time left the train at Council Bluffs, where they took the Overland stage further into the wilds of the far West.

The two noblemen rode with the driver on the box, enjoying every mile of the way, for they were lovers of nature and to them the ride was not tiresome except at night.

At Omaha they had received the following dispatch:

"Am at Overland station with escort to fort."

"TEXAS JACK,"

"Scout."

"I told you so," Sir John said, and they were at once at rest in their minds regarding the all-important means of reaching the fort, for between Indians and Deserters, every step of the way was dangerous.

It was just sunset when the coach rolled into the last station on that branch, and the driver was made happy over a couple of twenty-dollar gold-pieces thrust into his hands.

A cheer greeted them from the crowd, for Texas Jack had worked them up a reception.

The scout handed Lord Lonsfield a letter from the colonel, stating that both Surgeon Powell and Buffalo Bill had gone to Massacre Valley and that as Captain Taylor and Lieutenant Onderdonk were to go with their escort, they had not come to greet them, but Texas Jack and half a dozen scouts would conduct them to the fort.

Chips had been sent along also, to cook for them *en route*, and with themselves and their valet they would make quite a formidable party of eleven persons, enough to stand off any small band of red-skins and frighten away The Deserters from an attack.

As the tavern at the station was beyond reproach, the two Englishmen decided to start at once and camp on the way some miles out, so donning their border suits they were in the saddle half an hour after leaving the stage coach, their way lighted by a full moon.

CHAPTER XLIV.

MYSTERIOUS TRAILERS.

WHEN Texas Jack arrived at the Overland Station his keen eyes had taken in the fact that there were several very hard citizens there.

In the three days he was waiting there they had appeared to add to their numbers, and they had seemed particularly anxious to make his acquaintance, and had asked any number of questions about the people he was waiting for.

Texas Jack at last decided to get one of them drunk and see if he could not pump him.

He did succeed to an extent that made him feel very suspicious about being held up on the trail to the fort, and when they made an immediate start after the arrival of the coach, he noticed that his quondam friends were in quite a flurry, and also appeared about to go on a journey.

"We have got to look out for those fellows, pards," said Texas Jack to his men, as they were preparing to start.

"They won't dare tackle us, Pard Jack," was the answer of one of the scouts, who could not believe that three or four desperadoes would have the pluck to attack their party of eleven.

"I don't think they are all, Bob, and then an ambush counts for a great deal, you know."

"We must keep our eyes open, at any rate," said Jack, and the scouts knew that he meant it.

In the mean time, the hard-looking citizens were not idle.

They had been taken by surprise at the sudden departure of the party, not supposing they would leave the station before the following morning.

But they had dispersed to their several quarters.

Then, one by one they left the station, and an hour after met on the trail.

There were seven of them then, and taken altogether, they were as hard a lot of men as could readily be gotten together.

They were, however, splendidly mounted and armed, and would be dangerous foes.

The trails to the fort were two, one some twenty miles shorter than the other, and the easiest way to travel.

This one Texas Jack had decided to take, but after seeing the hostile demonstrations, as he considered them, of the men at the station, he changed to the longer trail, which caused some of his men to remark:

"Jack's uncommon cautious, hain't he?"

"Jack knows what he are about," responded another.

When, several miles from the station, the men following saw which trail had been taken, for the moonlight revealed the tracks, they came to a halt, and at once one appeared as leader.

"They go by Bald Mountain, pards, so, Buck, you start at once by the shorter trail, cross to this one at the Yellow Creek, and give the news."

"They camp to-night at the Boiling Spring, that is certain, so the place to ambush will be at Overhung Cliff."

The man addressed as Buck at once started off on the trail to the left, and the remainder of his comrades went into camp near by on the banks of a small creek, while the leader, on foot, made his way to Boiling Spring to see if he was right or wrong in his surmise as to where Texas Jack would go into camp.

Buck meanwhile rode rapidly on his way for miles, until he reached Yellow Creek, some twelve miles away.

Up this he turned and after an hour's ride came out in the trail which Texas Jack had taken to the fort.

There were a number of tracks on the trail, so trace of his horse would not be noticed particularly, and what would a party of eleven have to fear from one man if they did notice them.

Having reached the trail he started off at a gait as though he knew that he had an all night ride of it.

The moon lighted his way, and the trail was easy to follow, for it had been a direct route to and from the fort for a year or more, and though not made dusty by much use could boast of some one passing over it every day or two, a courier, an escort, or a scouting party.

The messenger, bound on some special mission, and evidently one for harm, not good, halted soon after midnight and stole a couple of hours, sleep for himself, and rest for his horse.

Resuming his way then, he held on until daylight, when he knew that he was all of forty miles ahead of Texas Jack and his party.

Resting his horse while he had breakfast, he then mounted and rode on more rapidly as though feeling that his journey would not last many hours longer.

Early in the forenoon he passed around a mountain, where a river ran on one side, following a shelf of rock, and the cliff rising a hundred feet above overhung the trail.

Just across the stream the other bank arose to considerable height, and was very rugged.

"Waal, that are ther very place fer ther boys to lie secure and pop 'em off as they goes round this side under ther cliffs, and pop 'em off they has ter, for Texas Jack hain't no man ter be held up, and killin' is all as can be did with him and his pards."

"Waal, I ought ter find ther cap'n not far from here, ther way-I has come," and the man set off again at a still more rapid pace.

CHAPTER XLV.

FOR LOVE OF GOLD.

THE horseman was not far from right, when he said he would meet the one he called the "cap'n" before long.

He had gotten a short distance beyond the overhanging cliff, and was riding along at a canter, when loud rung the command:

"Halt! Hands up!"

The man seemed to instinctively obey, for he reined his horse back on his haunches with a sudden and strong pull, and threw his hands, palms forward, above his head in an instant.

"Well, Buck, we gave you a good scare at least," cried a voice and a man in uniform stepped into view.

"Waal, sir, you did, for I wasn't expecting a hold up, and I thought as how some others was playing the road-agent game and had corraled me."

"I'm glad it's you, sir."

"You had nothing to lose, did you, if others than The Deserters had held you up?"

"Only my life, sir, for not having anything else," was the reply.

"Well, what news?"

"They are coming, sir."

"Which trail?"

"The valley trail."

"This one, then?"

"Yes, sir."

"Where is Jerry?"

"Back on their trail."

"How many?"

"He has five with him, sir."

"How many in the outfit to hold up?"

"Eleven, sir, counting the two Englishmen, their servant and a negro cook."

"That means seven fighting men, for the Englishmen, their servant and the negro are no good."

"Yes, sir."

"What officer is in charge?"

"No officer, sir."

"Who then?"

"Texas Jack."

"Ah!"

"That's the man, sir."

"I am sorry."

"It might have been Buffalo Bill, sir, or Surgeon Powell."

"True, but Texas Jack is equally as bad a man to tackle."

"He is, sir."

"He has six scouts with him?"

"Yes, sir."

"Picked men?"

"All of the scouts at the fort, sir, are picked men."

"I believe you are right."

"Where is the captain, sir?"

"He has not arrived yet, but we are expecting him every minute."

"Now how far back are the party we seek?"

"They'll reach here, sir, an hour before sunset, and Jerry said the Overhanging Cliffs were the place to hit them."

"The very place, for the men are in no danger there, and can pick off the scouts and not hurt the Englishmen, for in them our money lies, as they will pay big ransom to go free."

"They've got it, I hears."

"Oh, yes, and will be just enough scared to pay any sum the captain demands."

"Have you got all the boys, sir?"

"We will have enough— Ah! there comes the captain now."

As the man spoke, and who seemed to be a second leader, there came into view a horseman riding at a canter along the trail.

He was dressed in a full uniform, and wore the shoulder-straps of a captain of cavalry.

A sword hung by his side, his saddle and bridle were military, and he looked the beautiful officer, for his seat in the saddle was perfect.

But the strangest feature about him was that he wore a cavalry helmet with the visor down, completely shielding his face from view, and as gauntlet gloves covered his hands it could not be told whether he was white, red or black.

As he approached, the man who had been acting as sub-officer gave a call:

"Attention, Deserters?"

Instantly there came into view a dozen men, all of them clad in uniform.

Some wore trimmings of cavalry, others of infantry and several of artillery, and they came in squads according to the branch of the service they represented.

The under officer wore the chevrons of an orderly sergeant of artillery and another of the men had the stripes of an infantry corporal upon his arm.

The only thing that showed all were mounted were their boots and spurs.

The squad was armed with army rifles, and as the captain approached they presented arms in fine style, a salute he acknowledged with his sword.

"Well, Sergeant Crandall, you are in position, I see," said the captain.

"Not quite, sir, for we were waiting here until news comes from Jerry, sir."

"And you have heard?"

"Yes, sir, Buck arrived a short while before you did."

"And what word do you bring, sir?"

"The man told just what he had made known to Sergeant Crandall, and the captain listened attentively."

"Texas Jack is a bad hand to attack."

"I was in hopes Colonel Loyal would send only two or three scouts as an escort; but we will be, all told, twenty-one against eleven."

"The two Englishmen, the servant and the negro don't count, sir."

"Don't deceive yourself there, Crandall, for those two Englishmen are old soldiers, their valet is a man who has seen service in India, and Chips the negro can use a rifle with very deadly effect."

"We will have eleven men to fight."

"We can annihilate them at the Overhanging Cliffs."

"Yes, if we shot them down, which shall not be until I can see no other course, for to kill Texas Jack and his men means death to the Deserter band and this border, as I well know."

"No, there shall be no bloodshed unless I am compelled to kill!"

CHAPTER XLVI.

PREPARING FOR THE AMBUSH.

HAVING heard what the man Buck had to say, the captain suddenly asked, sternly:

"Why are you not in uniform, sir?"

"I dared not put it on, sir, until I met the command."

"All right, and you need not, as I wish you to take a fresh horse and return."

"Yes, sir."

"Say to Jerry that we will be in ambush at Overhanging Cliffs."

"I will have all my men, except those across the stream, in hiding in the rocks."

"I will remain on this side, and halt from ambush with my two men, while the others will show themselves over the stream to convince the party that resistance is useless."

"At the same time Jerry must have closed up close enough to see the signal from the rocks before they reach the ambush, and give a cheer in the rear of the party to see that retreat is impossible."

"Tell him with his seven, for you will be with them, in the rear, four of us in front, and ten across the stream, we must capture those Englishmen without bloodshed."

"If we cannot do so, then wipe out the whole party except the Englishmen and their servant, for under no condition must they be harmed."

"Do you understand?"

"Yes, sir."

The man was not long in obeying this order, for there was that about the captain of The Deserters which indicated that he was not one to trifle in anything.

He mounted a horse he exchanged with a comrade and set off at a rapid pace.

He held on until he came to a stream, and following its bed he turned off from the trail, reaching a distant hill where he hid himself in a position which commanded a view of the trail he had been following.

He had been there perhaps a couple of hours when he saw a horseman come in sight.

Even at that distance he recognized the horseman as Texas Jack.

He saw him dismount and examine the trail, and then go on his way, leading his horse.

At the brook he remounted and crossed.

But he halted on the other side, dismounted again and began to examine what Buck knew was his own trail.

"Texas Jack an' two durned couriers, I guess."

"Now, if he takes a notion to follow me up here, I has either got ter shoot him from ambush or run for it, and either will spile ther cap'n's leetle game ter git hold o' them Englishers."

"Now he are examining my tracks as though he were lookin' fer gold."

"And how far back ther rest o' his gang are."

"There they comes now, and I does hope Texas Jack will have the good sense ter go on."

The rest of the party now came in sight, and Buck saw that Texas Jack was pointing out his trail up to where it had led into the water.

After a short halt, to the great relief of the outlaw, the party went on once more.

"Waal, I am glad o' that, for Jack hain't no slouch."

He tumbled to it that I had turned up or down-stream right thar, and maybe when I seen him coming, he thought.

"Now that looked to him cur'ous, and so he were jist a-itching ter follow and satisfy his cur'osity, and I'm pleased ter death he didn't."

"Now how far back is Jerry and his outfit, I wonder."

He waited for half an hour before at last he was rewarded by seeing Jerry himself ride into view, and apparently watching the trail closely of those he followed.

Leaving his hiding-place Buck mounted his horse, and riding rapidly, met Jerry at the crossing.

"Well, Buck, what means your halting here?" slowly said Jerry.

"Oh, don't git cross, Corporal Jerry, for I has been on and seen the cap'n."

"Ahl that is good."

"Yes, he sent me back to confab with you."

"Where is he?"

"At the Overhanging Cliffs now."

"What did he say?"

"To have you come on and keep your eye ahead before reaching the cliffs, for the signal."

"Yes."

"Then you was to rush in and git thar with both feet."

"I understand."

"And you was ter show yourself, but ter do no shooting unless they charged back on you, for no one was to be kilt, unless it was not to be done without, while if ther Englishers and their sarvant was ter be hurted, there would be war in ther Deserter Band."

"All right, I'll be on hand."

"You'll have to push on lively then, for Jack's party is jist five mile ahead of you."

"So far as that?"

"Yas, Corporal Jerry."

"All right, I'll call up my men."

Soon after, the men came in sight, and from then on their pace was double that at which they had been traveling.

After setting the pace for his men, Corporal Jerry went on ahead with Buck and held the position until a number of miles had been passed over.

Then he allowed them to catch up, and gave the order:

"Uniforms, men!"

The men dispersed to the timber, and in five minutes all reappeared dressed in soldiers' uniform, representing two branches of the service, and Jerry had a corporal's stripes upon his arm, while Buck wore the chevron of a company bugler.

Forming by twos now, the men passed rapidly on until the Overhanging Cliffs came in sight, and then, far up the scene was visible a red flag waving from the top of a rock.

CHAPTER XLVII.

THE DESERTERS.

TEXAS JACK was suspicious all along the trail.

He was always cautious, though as brave a man as ever wore buckskin, but this time his extreme caution almost made the two Englishmen and his scouts impatient with him.

The fact was that Texas Jack had not liked those men at the station, who had tried so hard to be friendly.

He had seen enough to excite his anxiety, and he did not intend to walk into a trap if he could help it.

He had for that reason taken the best trail to avoid an ambush.

He had noticed just where Buck had come in to the trail from Yellow Creek, and again he had refound his fresh tracks, upon the outlaw courier's return, turn off the trail into the little brook, going up or down, that he could not tell as the water had washed away all traces.

At Overhanging Cliffs he had not expected an ambush, as the trail ran around a shelf of rock, and he never looked for men to take positions across the stream among the huge rocks there.

Above these rocks the cliffs towered some fifty feet, but slanted back from the stream, instead of hanging over as upon the other shore.

The trail at last turned from a valley around Overhanging Cliffs, and the scout considered that for a couple of miles at least there was no dread of an ambush and so he allowed the command to come up with him, for all along he had ridden alone half a mile ahead.

"Wild scenery this, Texas Jack," said Lord Lonsfield, glancing about him with real admiration.

"Yes, sir, and we camp about five miles from here in as sweet a spot as you ever saw."

"It will be a little early to camp, but to hold on we will have to go into the night before we reach another camping ground."

"You are the doctor, Jack, so do as you deem best; but when will we reach the fort?"

"By noon to-morrow, sir."

"I have noticed that you seemed quite anxious, Jack."

"Well, sir, I am not one to get scared at my own shadow; but the truth is I do not like certain signs I have seen, for I feared our coming has been announced."

"To whom?"

"The Deserters."

"The outlaw band?"

"Yes, sir."

"They appear to be a terror in this country, from all I hear."

"They are, sir."

"Tell me what you know of them, and Sir John will be glad to hear also."

"Yes, indeed, Jack," said Sir John.

"Well, I can only say that some years ago a gold fever bit the army, and some good men deserted to dig their fortunes in a few weeks as they supposed."

"But the gold turned out to be a mere trace, and the men found themselves branded as deserters, and hunted down."

"With no money, and not daring to return to the service, they banded themselves together as outlaws, and it is said that their chief is a commissioned officer, or was one who was dismissed for some act he committed, but the truth of this no one knows."

"The men still dress in uniform, cavalry, infantry and artillery, according to the branch of the service to which they belonged."

"They were good men too, and they are under an iron discipline, and know the country thoroughly."

"What makes them most dreaded no one knows their retreats, or where they intend to strike."

"One time it is a coach, another time a raid into the settlement, then a paymaster is held up, and again a wagon train is robbed."

"They range over a country a hundred miles in extent, here to-day and gone to-morrow, and as I saw some hard fellows at the station, who were too devilish inquisitive, I have been more than cautious."

"But how many of these men are there?"

"Some say ten, others thirty, and I have heard them estimated as high as fifty."

"And do not fear the Indians?"

"That is just the trouble sir, of the army hunting them down, for they are on friendly terms with the Indians, who know that they are the foes of their foes."

"And every effort has been made to run them down."

"Yes, sir, every commanding officer on the frontier has hunted them, and there is a standing offer for their bodies, dead or alive, of five hundred dollars to the man, and five thousand for their chief."

"Now and then we scouts got a crack at one, but very seldom I assure you, sir."

"Buffalo Bill has captured one I heard."

"Yes, sir, he brought him in dead, for they had met on the trail and fought it out."

"He was an infantry soldier we all knew well, and a desperate fellow."

"Surgeon Powell shot one also in a duel in a camp, where he recognized him, and I captured an artillery soldier, and in spite of all I could

do the settlers took him from me and strung him up."

"If any others have been killed or captured, I have not heard of it, for in a fight they carry off their dead, having led horses ready with hospital-saddles to throw them on.—Hark!"

At the order of the scout, the command came to a halt, just as loud and clear was heard the command:

"Halt! Hands up, all!"

CHAPTER XLVIII.

THE DEMAND.

THE loud command, uttered in a very threatening voice, fell upon the ears of the party under Texas Jack with a suddenness that was startling.

At the same instant, as Texas Jack whipped out his revolvers and called to his men to follow, there came shouts from across the stream, and there were visible a number of men, who, stowing themselves rifle in hand, sprung back to their safe covert.

As they were not two hundred feet away, they could pour in a deadly fire.

Hardly had the ambushed men revealed themselves, when four horsemen appeared in front on the narrow trail.

"We must break through them!"

"Come!" cried Texas Jack, but the hand of Lord Lonsfield grasped his bridle-rein just as a bugle was heard in their rear, and two hundred yards distant there rode around the bend of the cliff a party of seven horsemen, also in uniform.

"My God! we must ride them down, pards!"

"You follow, Lord Lonsfield, with the others!" cried Texas Jack.

"Hold, man!"

"I yield to no one where there is one chance of escape, but to resist here would be madness."

"See! yonder rifles cover us, in our rear are half our number, perhaps more, and in our front is their chief, and he certainly has others than the three we see with him."

"Under the circumstances we must consent to be robbed," and Lord Lonsfield spoke with the greatest coolness.

"Yes, Texas Jack, resistance would be madness in this case," Sir John Reeder said.

"Yes, Pord Jack, we must up with our hands, for they has us dead sure," a scout remarked.

Texas Jack saw that those with him were right.

They had seen, during the hasty glance of the men across the stream, and in their front and rear what appeared to be double their own numbers.

The cliff overhung them, they were upon a ledge of rock not twenty feet wide, and could be mowed down by the men among the rocks.

So he did what was best, yielded.

"Do you surrender?" came the command from the Deserter captain.

"We are willing to compromise," answered Texas Jack.

"No compromise will be accepted."

"Do you surrender?"

"Do you demand our lives or money, for it will be no surrender if you ask our lives?"

"I want your money, and if you do not yield to my demand, then I will take your lives."

"You agree to this?"

"I do, though you are wholly at my mercy."

"Not so much as you think, Deserter captain," and somehow Texas Jack's answer caused the Deserters to grow uneasy, and the captain to determine to hasten matters.

But he said:

"Bah! your threats are of no avail."

"Are they not, Deserter captain?"

"No."

"Ask your man who was at the station if I did not suspect your spies there, and take care to guard against a surprise?"

At this the Deserters grew still more uneasy, and the captain turned and spoke to his men near him.

As for those of Texas Jack's party they saw that he was playing a bold game of "bluff," to get the best terms he could, and his own scouts and the Englishmen admired his nerve.

The Deserter captain, after speaking with the three men near him called out:

"If you have sent for cavalry to meet you, only a few men would come, and I have with me enough to whip a troop, for my men fight with a halter around their necks."

"Yes, and they'll dance with a rope around their necks some day."

"Bah! if I had the fort scouts here with me I'd say fight it out if you wanted gold."

"You are only trying to gain time, so I'll have no more delay."

"What do you want then?"

"Have you scouts any money?"

"No, we are dead broke."

"That remains to be seen."

"Well, search us."

"You are escorting two English gentlemen."

"Well?"

"One is Lord Lonsfield, the other Sir John Reeder."

"Who said they were not?"

"I demand those two men."
 "What two?"
 "The two named."
 "They say that they have some thousand dollars or so in money with them, and the rest is in personal drafts which they alone can collect."
 "I want their money."
 "Come and get it."
 "And have you get me in your power and thus make terms with my men."
 "You are a shrewd fellow, Texas Jack."
 "How will you get the money then?"
 "Let them put their money, and you and your men also, in a hat and send it to me by that negro."
 "Lordy, boss, I don't want ter handle no other people's money, sah."
 "Do as I tell you, Chips, or one of my men across the stream will shoot you."
 "He's onto you, Chips," said Texas Jack with a laugh.
 "How de debble did dat man know me."
 "Lordy, Massa Jack, what I going to do?"
 In response Jack called out:
 "See here, man, don't scare our darkie to death for I'll bring the cash to you."
 "You?"
 "Yes."
 "No, I want those two Englishmen to bring it."
 "All right, Sir Outlaw, I'll do it," called out Lord Lonsfield.
 "And so will I; but there is no need of both of us, Lord Lonsfield."
 "Yes, I want both of you."
 "There is some trick in this, gentlemen, for I am sure that he wants to hold you for ransom," and raising his voice Texas Jack called out:
 "Will you let these gentlemen return?"
 "Yes, when they pay me the ransom I demand," was the cool response.

CHAPTER XLIX.

THE DEMAND ANSWERED.

TEXAS JACK seemed very much worried by this demand of the Deserter captain. He seemed to feel that it reflected upon him for not protecting those under his escort. So he said:
 "See here, Deserter chief, let us settle this affair between us."
 "Well."
 "I mean between you and I."
 "How so?"
 "I'll fight you mounted or afoot, with rifles, revolvers or knives, and if you kill me you get my outfit. If I kill you, then we pass."
 "It is a tempting challenge, Texas Jack, but I can not accept it."
 "Then you acknowledge yourself a coward as well as a thief?"
 "Do not go too far!"
 "How far will I have to go to make you forget you are a coward?" was the stinging question.
 "See here, Texas Jack, I am in search of gold now, not lead or steel; but you'll get the latter with a vengeance if you attempt to dally any longer."
 "I want gold, and those two Englishmen I know to be very wealthy, and a few thousands apiece to them amounts to nothing, which to me and my men is a great deal."
 "Been too poor of late to pay off, I suppose?"
 "I will answer all of your insults at another time, Texas Jack, and meet you in a duel too, unless you force me to kill you to-day; but now I am on a gold trail and will have it."
 "You don't dare fire on us, for you know that Colonel Loyal would hunt every one of you to the gallows if it took every soldier on the border."
 "Don't try me to far."
 "I defy you."
 "Come! I want no more of this."
 "Will you two Englishmen come here, or shall I order my men to shoot down every man of that party but yourselves and your valet?"
 "What is your demand, sir?" asked Lord Lonsfield riding forward a few paces.
 "I demand you and Sir John to surrender yourselves to me!"
 "Well?"
 "Your valet can remain with your baggage."
 "What treatment will we receive?"
 "The courtesy due you as British officers, for I mean you no harm, if you will accept my demand."
 After a word with Sir John Reeder, Lord Lonsfield asked:
 "What is the sum you demand of us?"
 "Is there any difference in your incomes, for I do not wish to be unjust?"
 "You are exceedingly kind."
 "It would be hard to convince Texas Jack of that."
 "He knows you better, perhaps," was the quick retort of the nobleman.
 "You have not answered my question."
 "As to our incomes?"
 "I care not for the amount of it, only if there is any difference between yours and Sir John's?"
 "There is."

"Whose income is the largest?"
 "Mine."
 "Much?"
 "Well, enough to have me offer the difference for the ransom of both of us."
 "What will the amount be?"
 "Some seven or eight thousand dollars."
 "It is not enough."
 "What do you demand?"
 "Fifteen thousand from you and ten from Sir John Reeder, Lord Lonsfield."
 "If we refuse?"
 "Then, instead of my getting gold, you will receive lead."
 "I will consult with Sir John."
 "Talk quick, then, Lord Lonsfield, for I don't half like Texas Jack's silence."
 "Silence is golden, Deserter captain," answered Jack, with a light laugh.
 "Well, my lord, talk fast, for I am in a hurry."
 Turning to Sir John, Lord Lonsfield said with a smile:
 "I see no way out of this but compliance, Sir John."
 "We have no guarantee of good faith."
 "True, yet we have to trust to him."
 "And he demands that we become his prisoners until the amount is paid?"
 "Yes."
 "It is a large sum."
 "Very true, but we will have to economize for half a year or so."
 "I will do as you say, Lucien."
 "Very well," and Lord Lonsfield turned again to the Deserter captain and said:
 "Sir John agrees to your terms, as I do."
 "You are wise."
 "You are to hold us captive while you send a draft and get your money, the amount demanded, when we are to be set free at a point whence we can readily make our way to the fort."
 "I will agree to your terms in this, but after a talk with my men, I feel compelled to ask double the amount I said."
 "You show the cloven foot very quickly, Sir Outlaw."
 "I asked too small a sum, I now recognize; but for fifty thousand, made payable in three different drafts, from separate banks, I will treat you with every courtesy and escort you within sight of the fort myself, for I often go near it to see how affairs go there."
 Lord Lonsfield turned again to Sir John, who said:
 "I suppose, Lord Lonsfield, we must agree to his terms and trust to a rescue from our gallant American friends."
 "Make any terms with him, Lord Lonsfield, that he demands, for he has not got you or the money yet," said Texas Jack in a low tone.
 They looked toward him, as did his men, for an explanation, and he said:
 "Ride toward them when they demand it, and be ready to act when the time comes."
 Again they looked at the scout with increased surprise, but before more could be said, the Deserter captain called out:
 "Come, Lord Lonsfield, what is your answer to my last demand?"
 "I accept, as does Sir John."
 "All right, come here both of you, and leave your companions where they are."
 "Do as he says!" almost sternly ordered Texas Jack, and the two Englishmen rode toward the Deserter captain.

CHAPTER L.

IN AMBUSH.

"THE fellow is a magnificent specimen of manhood, John," said Lord Lonsfield, as the two prepared to go toward the outlaws.
 "He is indeed. I wonder if we will get a glimpse of his face?"
 "No one has ever seen him without his helmet and visor down, sir," Texas Jack assured, "or, at least, so it is said."
 "Well, Jack, give our regards to the colonel and explain the situation."
 "I will, Lord Lonsfield, and should you be made captives, Colonel Loyal will see to it that these devils never get a dollar for your release," said the scout.
 "I do not doubt that, and I hope so, for did we have to pay so large a sum it would cripple us somewhat, I admit."
 "Blazer, take care of our traps, and our money, and await at the fort until we return."
 "I will, my lord, and Sir John, I will, and I only wish I was to keep you company," replied Blazer.
 "You are in luck not to have to do so, Blazer; but we must be off, so good-by all," and the nobleman waved his hand, while Sir John did the same with a kindly farewell to the scouts.
 "I does hate ter see yer go, gemman, I does indeed," said Chips.
 Texas Jack answered the wave of farewell by raising his sombrero.
 There was a smile upon his face which neither Lord Lonsfield or Sir John understood, for the former remarked as they rode off together:
 "I suspect Texas Jack intends to play some bold game."

"I fear so, for it could end only in disaster for himself and men."
 "He is a plucky fellow, and full of clever schemes they say; but he has not let us into this one, if he has any in view."
 "Brave as lions, pards, are these two gallant Englishmen," said Texas Jack as they rode away.
 And this was the opinion of all the party.
 They watched Lord Lonsfield and Sir John riding along leisurely, to surrender themselves to a treacherous outlaw, and the men did not understand the complacent smile upon Texas Jack's face, or a moment after his words:
 "Stand ready, pards!"
 Hardly had his words been uttered when there came a rattle of rifles.
 It seemed that they came from the clouds, and the result was most startling to even the scouts. But they came from the high cliff across the river, from over the heads of the ambushed outlaws there.
 And when one shot dropped a man from his saddle, who was standing next to the Deserter captain, other shots, now rattling rapidly were poured down upon the terrified and fleeing outlaws beneath them, who hastily ran for their horses and fled, though not until they had left a couple of their men behind them.
 The party in the rear, under Jerry, also got several shots poured into their ranks, which sent them to the rightabout with the loss of a couple of horses and one man.
 And all this happened within the space of a quarter of a minute, and before Texas Jack could even get his men into a charge upon the Deserter captain and those with him.
 And above the rattle of rifles were heard war-cries wild and terrible and which caused the scouts to shout out in chorus:
 "Buffalo Bill!"
 "The Surgeon Scout!"
 As for Lord Lonsfield and Sir John, they were for a moment completely dazed by surprise.
 The smile of Texas Jack was explained, for they saw him leading his scouts in a rush upon the Deserter captain and those with him.
 And they heard the wild, weird war-cry of Buffalo Bill's Buckskin Brotherhood as they rushed to battle.
 But the Deserter captain seemed confounded by the surprise, and could not but feel that a large force of cavalry were upon him.
 With his men divided as they were in three parties, and some of them dead, not to speak of knowing what force he had to combat, he could do only one thing.
 That he did do, and with a haste that placed him and the two men remaining with him around the bend in an instant.
 Into a canyon they turned, and amid the thick timber scattered in three directions, though making their way around toward Jerry and his party.
 Had the two Englishmen not been between the scouts and the Deserter captain, a volley might have brought him down; but when they came up with Lord Lonsfield and Sir John, who joined in the charge, they found that they had escaped them.
 "Three of you go in chase, while I return to see after the others," cried Texas Jack.
 But Lord Lonsfield called out:
 "Do you not think it best to keep our force together, Jack, and move on away from this ambush, for it seems that the rescuing force is a small one?"
 "Yes, Lord Lonsfield, it would be best by far, sir," and Jack massed his party and halted at the mouth of the canyon, while his men broke forth in wild cheers in which the two Englishmen joined them.
 "Fire a few shots," ordered Texas Jack, "for each party will think we are after the others."
 This was done, while rifle-shots from the other side of the stream were also heard from their retreat.
 A moment after the three horsemen rode into view upon the other shore, and the scouts cheered lustily as they recognized Buffalo Bill, the Surgeon Scout and old Trapper Dennis.

CHAPTER LI.

THE UNKNOWN CAMP.

It will be remembered that Colonel Loyal had said in his dispatch to Lord Lonsfield and Sir John Reeder, that Buffalo Bill and Surgeon Powell would take the trail to Massacre Valley, to see what they could discover.
 They had done so several days after the dispatch had been received from the Englishman announcing their immediate departure for the West.
 They had gone together, while Texas Jack having returned with the telegram, departed with half a dozen of his men to serve as escort for the Englishman to the fort.
 In the mean time Frank Powell and Cody, splendidly mounted and well supplied for a long trail, set off to meet old Trapper Tom at the rendezvous he had appointed.
 Before entering the Massacre Valley they branched off to the left up a wild, rugged valley

through which rushed a stream which at places was a torrent.

Trapper Dennis had told them to ride about a mile from the mouth of this canyon-like valley and they would find him near them at a certain time of the day.

They timed themselves to reach there as he had directed, and halted near a huge boulder which the stream rushed around with great force and which he had told them of.

As they descended they started, for near them came the words:

"Morning, gents."

"Trapper Dennis, you are here," cried Buffalo Bill.

"At your service, pard."

"But where are you?" asked Surgeon Powell, for the old trapper was not visible.

"I'm a-coming, gents," and with this the trapper swung from the top of a tree and came down rapidly by aid of a lasso.

"You live up a tree now, old man?"

"No, Bill, I was just prospectin' fer yer."

"But come on to my shanty, if some one ain't on yer trail."

"Not a soul; but do you live up this way?"

"I does."

"Where is your horse?"

"In the pasture."

"Ah! you have a pasture, have you?"

"I has, and a good one, with accommodations for your critters, too," and the trapper led the way up the canyon.

At last he came to where the stream crossed from side to side.

He said simply:

"Come right in arter me," and he waded in and turned up the stream, the scouts following him.

He came to the side of the cliff, where a large mass of rock had fallen long before, bringing with it a thick growth of trees that had grown upon the summit, and which were so dense as to appear impenetrable.

Up the rough rocks went the trapper, and pushing aside the bushes, said in his quaint way:

"Come in, gents."

The horses scrambled up the steep and pushed on into the bushes, leaving no trace on the rocks of their tracks.

Once in the bushes there was visible a slight opening, and after a few rods it came to the cliff where there was a cavern in it of considerable size.

"Pards, ther water's washed into this cave ontill it broke the cliff down, as you sees, and nobody, not even a Injun, would suspect an opening here."

"But jist come right through, and I'll show you thet this is a island, and this be about the only way you kin get ontar it, while it are all serene and pleasant once yer git thar."

Buffalo Bill and Surgeon Powell followed the old trapper in wonder through the cave, and soon came out into a really beautiful spot.

"It was a basin as fertile as a garden, some acres in size, and surrounded by a natural wall of cliffs."

The trapper's two horses were grazing there, and nestling away amid some trees was a small cabin of logs.

"So this is your home, Trapper Dennis?" said Frank Powell.

"You bet it be, Doc, and you two is the first I has ever let know of it, and no Injun has ever tracked me here."

"Now jist make yerselves at home, for here is whar I have come back ter live since I has seen Chicago."

The scouts did as they were told and were soon resting beneath the trapper's trees in front of his cabin, while he set to work to get dinner.

The horses had been turned loose as they could only leave through the cavern and would not do that of their own accord.

"I had a 'tarnal time gitting my critters in here, you bet, pards."

"But I managed it at last, and now they comes and goes easy when I wishes."

"Yer see I lived here without a horse-critter for so long, for I always booted it when I went on my round after pelts and ter set my traps."

"I has had Injuns chase me, but I allus dodged about so as ter git inter ther canyon at night and then they lost me."

"Why I has known 'em ter lay outside in the lower end o' the valley, awaiting ter starve me out, for a whole week, while I were jist a-layin' low here in ther island."

"Now, pards, how goes all at the fort?"

"Good, trapper, and the English gentlemen are on their way West now."

"I am glad."

"What have you done, old man?"

"Nothing, Bill, though I has hunted the country over to find the White Spirit of the Mountains, or to capter a Injun, so as I c'd scare out of him all be knows about ther captives in ther Head Village of ther Sioux."

"So yer see I has done nothing."

"Well, we will start on the hunt together tomorrow, and perhaps we may find out what we wish to know."

"I thinks we will, Bill; but now come, you and Doc, and have some supper, and then we can talk it over."

This invitation was at once accepted by the scouts with pleasure.

CHAPTER LII.

A MYSTERIOUS TRAIL.

BOTH Buffalo Bill and Surgeon Powell were charmed with the old trapper's den, as he called it.

A strange freak of nature had made an island walled in with cliffs of rock, and fertile and beautiful within the basin thus formed.

To one going entirely around it not a suspicion would be aroused of the beauty within, and excepting a few pines growing upon the cliffs no vegetation was visible.

The stream in the canyon on one side guarded it, and the same stream, a perfect foaming torrent, on the other side, prevented near approach.

The old trapper had crept there one day, to hide from Indians, and had thus found the cavern, penetrated it and was happy.

There he had made his home, and it was a mystery to the Sioux how he disappeared when they pursued him, and equally one to the whites on the border how old Dennis dare live there in the Indian country, on the edge of Massacre Valley, as it were.

He had his traps set, and visited them as he could, and he was happy again, far happier than he would have been with a fortune in the East.

He enjoyed his Chicago experience even at the great cost, and loved to think it over, and feel proud over what he had passed through.

"It were wuss than being corraled by Injuns, it were; but Lordy, what a shine ther gals tuk to me, Bill," he said, in recalling it.

As a barrier at the cavern would keep the horses in the island the scouts built it, and then felt safe.

The log cabin though small was comfortable, a good winter house, with enormous fireplace and chimney built of rocks.

There was wood in plenty, water right at hand, and pasturage enough to keep a dozen horses through the year.

The old trapper loved flowers, and he always had a large bunch on the table in a clay bowl he had made and burned himself.

He was a good liver and had the best game the woods afforded, while he had a garden which furnished him vegetables.

Other supplies he went to the fort after every six weeks, and had been in the habit of carrying a load of sixty to seventy pounds to his retreat strapped upon his back, for in spite of being on the verge of three score years he was a perfect giant in strength, was never ill, and could run and jump with any one.

The birds were singing merrily when Buffalo Bill and Frank Powell awoke in the morning, and Dennis was preparing a breakfast which he said "would make their hair curl."

They certainly enjoyed it, and afterward set out upon a tramp on foot into Massacre Valley.

They visited every one of the ruined homes in the settlement, noted the names of each family cut into the trees, and compared them with the list of the white captive who had escaped but to die.

He had the names of every man, woman and child in the fatal valley.

There was the name of Granger Goldhurst, and following on the list were:

"Mrs. Lucille Goldhurst.

"Hugh Hubbard—youth, and brother of Mrs. G.

"Baby Goldhurst, child of Mr. and Mrs. G."

Then followed the name given by Granger Goldhurst to his home:

"VALLEY REST."

On the list too were the names of the two negroes, and even the cowboys who belonged to the Goldhurst Ranch had been put down under their nicknames, their others not being known.

The poor fellow had gotten the list strangely correct, and at last making his escape from his terrible captivity had met Trapper Dennis only to die.

To his grave the trapper led the scouts, and there they camped for the night, anxious the next day to see if any trace of the White Spirit of the Mountains could be found, for upon that mysterious man, if alive, rested the success of their undertaking in a great measure.

The next morning when they started out from their camp, Buffalo Bill suddenly halted and pointed to some horse-tracks in the valley.

"See there!"

"Yes, fresh tracks."

"And iron-shod."

"Yes, passed very lately."

"Since daylight."

"Who can it be?"

"Them Deserters sometimes passes up this way, pards," said Trapper Dennis.

"I have heard they have a retreat up here."

"I is sure of it, Bill."

"You have seen them?"

"Often, but never near enough to git a scalp."

"And you think this is one?"

"Who else could it be?" asked Powell.

"Maybe it is a courier from the fort," suggested the trapper.

"No, none expected to follow us, and yet had the colonel sent any one, it would have been to await us at the rendezvous you appointed, trapper."

"Then it's a outlaw going to the camp, and I has noticed when I seen one trail this way, next day I seen going right back over it the tracks of a dozen horses."

"That means he had been after the band."

"Sure."

"Well, we'll scout to-day, come back here to-night, and see if any other tracks are visible."

"If they be, Bill, then it will mean a raid upon a settlement, wagon-train or coach by them Deserters."

"Well, we shall see to-morrow," said Buffalo Bill, and after scouting all day in a vain search for some trace of the White Spirit of the Mountains, the three men of the Buckskin Brotherhood returned to their camp of the night before.

CHAPTER LIII.

IN THE NICK OF TIME.

THE next morning the three men in buckskin arose with the first glimmer of dawn, and while Trapper Dennis, who was a natural cook, prepared breakfast, and Buffalo Bill packed up the traps and rolled up the blankets, Surgeon Powell strolled down into the valley to have a look at the trail of the day before.

It was a quarter of a mile from the camp, and coming upon the spot, he halted, suddenly.

There was a fresh trail at his feet, going in the opposite direction of the one the day before, and following back on it.

The Surgeon Scout followed it a short distance, and then said to himself:

"I have counted thirteen tracks as well as I can make out, and that means as many horses and riders."

"All of the horses are iron shod, also, so they are not Indians."

"That fellow who passed yesterday was, as Dennis surmised, a courier beyond all doubt."

"Now, we could strike this trail here and follow it back to their retreat with perfect ease."

"I'll go and report."

He arrived at the camp just as Trapper Dennis had breakfast ready.

"Well, Frank, been to see the trail?"

"Yes, Bill."

"What did you find?"

"Thirteen shod horses going back over it, that is all."

"The mischief!" said Buffalo Bill.

"Didn't I tell you so?" was the exultant utterance of Trapper Dennis.

"Yes; and they passed along before dawn, so must have gone by three hours ago."

"Well, what do you think, Doc?"

"I believe we could readily follow back to their retreat and take it."

"A good idea."

"I believe," said Trapper Dennis, "that somebody is going to die and be robbed, for them is Deserters and they is on a red trail, or I lies for love of it."

"What do you think of going to their retreat, Dennis?"

"Waal, Bill, we could git to their retreat, but we is twenty miles away from our critters, and that means a tramp there and back."

"Then ther retreat are up close to ther Injun village, I are sart'in, and if we gits thar we may only find a few broken-down old horses and a man or two, so I says hunt ther trail them devils is gone on."

"You are right, trapper, for that is just what we should do," said Buffalo Bill, and turning to the Surgeon Scout he asked:

"What do you think, Doc?"

"I was in favor of breaking up their retreat: but as the trapper says we may find nothing there to repay us, and perhaps a larger force than we would dare attack, while we could help some poor unfortunates by following upon the trail of The Deserters, for, though but three of us, a surprise counts for a great deal, you know."

"Waal now it do, and we is three ter count on, ef I does say so," says Trapper Dennis.

So the traps were shouldered and the three men struck out for the trail in the valley.

To their great delight it led down toward the trapper's retreat and passed through a mountain gorge within a couple of miles of it.

The three were rapid and untiring walkers, and in six hours made the distance to the retreat.

They at once got their things together for a long trail, saddled their horses, and with the trapper's extra one as a pack-animal, they moved out of the secret valley.

They struck upon the trail half an hour before sunset, and at a rapid gallop followed it until too dark to see it.

Then only did they go into camp.

"As I calculate it, we are just about five hours behind 'em, pards," said the trapper.

"Well, we will be up and all ready for a start as soon as we can see the trail, and with the rest our horses have had we can push them hard to-morrow," Buffalo Bill responded.

"Do you notice the way the trail goes, Bill? It will lead us, if it does not branch off, toward the courier trail from the fort to the Overland Station."

"By Jove, Frank, you have hit it, sure."

"Those fellows are going to strike the fort trail and lay for something on it they have gotten wind of."

"I tell you we must hustle to-morrow, or we may be too late."

After a good night's rest the three trailers were ready the next morning with the first moment of light, to go on their way.

They did in fact go almost by feeling the tracks over the first mile of the way, for all were dismounted and leading their horses.

But after awhile the brightening skies enabled them to see the trail and they pushed rapidly on for several hours before they halted for breakfast.

Just at noon they came upon the place where the party had camped for the past night, and it was easy then to count the spots where the horses had been staked out, and there were thirteen.

The fire was still burning, and the start had been made while the dew was on the ground, showing that they too were pushing along at a good speed.

But the three trailers felt assured that they had gained upon them considerably since the start and they kept up the same steady pace, urging their horses to a speed which they felt they could stand and not break down.

When they camped that night the trailers were not far behind those they pursued, and at noon the following day they came in sight of them, Buffalo Bill reconnoitering ahead on foot and coming back to report:

"They have halted and are in ambush."

"We are in the nick of time."

CHAPTER LIV.

AMBUSHERS AMBUSHED.

WHAT the scout had discovered as he went ahead on foot to reconnoiter, leaving Frank Powell and the trapper with the tired horses, he explained as follows:

"We are just two miles from the Overhanging Cliffs, on the opposite side of the river from them, and you know that the lower fort trail passes right around them."

"Now the party we have been following crossed the river above; but I saw them returning just in time to get out of sight."

"They met others on the other shore I am certain, and but ten came back again."

"Those hid their horses in a ravine and muffled their noses."

"That means they wish no sound to betray their presence."

"Yes, Frank, and the riders then went along the lower ridge and hid among the rocks just opposite where the trail under Overhanging Cliffs is narrowest."

"Others stayed across the stream, hiding in the rocks at the end of the Cliffs, and where the thick timber begins."

"This shows that those they are waiting for are coming from the Overland Station," said Frank Powell.

"That is it, and they cannot be very far away, so we had better take position."

"Can we get a good place?"

"You remember that opposite the Overhanging Cliffs the bank rises high on this side of the stream?"

"Yes."

"Well, there is where I reconnoitered from, and we can ride to within half a mile of it, hide our horses, and then creep to a position above those ambushers."

"In fact, ambush the ambushers, Bill?"

"Just so."

"That will be prime," Trapper Dennis said, with a glad look on his face.

"Well, we'll get off at once," and Buffalo Bill mounted and led the way.

A secure spot was found for the horses, and they were left saddled and bridled, in case of being needed in a hurry, while their noses were muffled to prevent their scenting the other horses and neighing.

Then the three trailers went on up to the top of the hill.

They had left everything they did not need behind with the horses, and in fighting-trim at last reached a position commanding a view of the rocks beneath them and the trail running around under Overhanging Cliffs.

Fortunately for them, there was a fringe of bushes growing along the edge of the bank, and through these they peeped at their foes, and were masters of the situation.

"They are Deserters, Bill, for see, they are in uniform."

"But who are they waiting to attack?" said Frank Powell.

"That is the question," responded Buffalo Bill.

"Some one who is worth while a-holding up, pards, yer kin gamble on that," said Trapper Dennis.

After a moment of silence, Surgeon Powell said:

"Our means to attack, Bill, must be by firing on the halting party, then at those under the cliff beneath us."

"Yes, and there will be a party to fall in behind those who are held up to prevent retreat, so we must throw a little lead into them too, Doc."

"You are right, Bill; but it suddenly strikes me who it is that The Deserters are after."

"Well?"

"They have come out in large force and that shows that the game is worth the candle, and what better game could they wish to get hold of than our English friends?"

"Surgeon Powell you have hit the nail squarely on the head, for that is just it, and our English friends are expected along about this time."

"But wouldn't there be a cavalry escort with 'em, pards?" asked Trapper Dennis.

"No, for it was not thought to be necessary, as Texas Jack and half a dozen scouts were to act as an escort."

"Well, Buffalo Bill knows what his scouts is; but yonder force is too big for 'em, as he sees, especially as they is tuk at sich a disadvantage as they will be here," Trapper Dennis remarked.

"Well, whoever they intend to hold up, we will ambush the ambushers and give them a surprise they little expect."

"We are but three, but I believe we may turn their expected victory into defeat."

"Yes, doctor, we must," was Buffalo Bill's energetic reply.

The three now crept to their respective positions and remained in silent watchfulness for what was coming.

They saw that the party to do the halting had taken cover, the men in the rocks beneath them had also sunk down out of sight, and all was as quiet as though there was not a tragedy to be enacted there in a short while.

It would have seemed like hours to wait, to men not drilled in patience as they were, and as also The Deserters had been trained, but they did not note the time, any of them, anxious though they were.

As for Trapper Dennis his lonely life had earned him to heed not the passing of time and he was just as contented there as he would have been anywhere else, if I make an exception of Chicago.

At last there appeared in view around the bend of the cliffs a horseman.

The three men on the cliffs across the stream knew him at a glance.

It was Texas Jack.

Then the others came in sight, and soon after the Deserter captain appeared in the trail ahead, the men among the rocks revealed themselves, and the party to guard the rear advanced.

What followed the reader has seen, for the

three men in ambush set to flight the outlaw ambushers, and were masters of the situation.

CHAPTER LV.

THE THREE RESCUERS.

AT the last moment, when all hope seemed gone from them, the keen eyes of Texas Jack had caught sight of a half-shielded form above the head of the ambushers.

He saw a waving hand, as a signal, and then the form of Buffalo Bill, for an instant only.

From that moment he had no dread.

How the scout got there he did not know, and had no time to consider; but he was sure that he was not mistaken, and that if Buffalo Bill was there he was not alone.

He dared not make his discovery known, for fear the secret might be betrayed by some of them inadvertently, and so he had told Lord Lonsfield to accept any terms offered him.

Of course the surprise to The Deserters had been complete and fatal.

A man by the side of the Deserter captain had fallen, and others had bit the dust across the stream, and back with the guard under Corporal Jerry.

Those across the stream had fled for their lives, mounted their horses and continued their flight in a body.

They only sought to get away, and separated from their chief, would await him, or orders, at their retreat, if the Deserter captain was not killed, as they feared.

What the force attacking them was they did not know, or care, for they had heard the terrible war-cries of Buffalo Bill and Surgeon Powell, and these they knew but too well.

Another war-cry, unknown to them, had been heard, and then had followed cheers, such as soldiers give together; but the fugitive outlaws did not know that these came from Buffalo Bill, the Surgeon Scout and Trapper Dennis, intended to make them believe a military force was also near.

So rapid had been the fire of the three men from their repeating-rifles, and aimed first at the party under the Deserter captain, then at those hidden among the rocks, and again at "Corporal Jerry" and his band, that the outlaws had not been the only ones deceived, as Texas Jack and his scouts felt sure that there was a body of cavalry at hand.

When, therefore, they had halted to await their coming to join them, they were more than surprised to behold three horsemen appear in view.

They saw them go among the rocks and throw two dead bodies across their saddles, and then seek a ford lower down.

Texas Jack then sent two men back to get the body of the man killed with Corporal Jerry's band, and to strip the two slain horses of their saddles and bridles as trophies.

A fourth man slain, and a wounded horse was found where the Deserter captain had stood.

"Buffalo Bill!"

"Surgeon Powell!"

"Trapper Dennis!"

Such were the cries as the three men were recognized in their turn, and when they had crossed the stream and drew near Texas Jack and his party, they were greeted with a wild yell of welcome from the scouts, in which the two Englishmen, Blazer, their valet, and Chips most heartily joined.

"Where are the soldiers, Bill?"

"Are they not coming across?" cried Texas Jack, before they reached them.

"What soldiers, Jack?"

"Those we heard cheer on the other side."

"We three were guilty of that, and if we fooled you, Jack, we certainly did the outlaws."

"And you three were all, Cody?" called out Lord Lonsfield in amazement.

"Yes, my lord, and we happened to be just enough; but I am mighty glad to see you, and welcome you and Sir John back to the Wild West so soon."

The two Englishmen warmly grasped the hand of the chief of scouts, and Surgeon Powell now coming up, was also most cordially greeted, while he said:

"You are back far sooner than you expected to be, gentlemen, but you are, nevertheless, more than welcome."

"And how happens it, Bill, that you are here when I thought you were up in Massacre Valley?" Texas Jack asked.

In a few words Buffalo Bill explained the situation, and the rescuers were congratulated upon their having followed the trail leading down from the mountains.

"Had you not done so," Lord Lonsfield said, earnestly, "we would have now been in the clutches of those outlaws, where our lives would hardly have been safe, I feel sure, and if so, then we would have been robbed of more money than either of us can spare."

"We have much to thank you for, indeed."

"Indeed, we have, and our life-long gratitude is yours," Sir John Reeder added.

Then Surgeon Powell introduced to them Trapper Dennis, as the one whose coming to the fort had been the reason for Colonel Loyal's recalling them when they had heard the old frontiersman's story.

The old trapper seemed pleased with his reception by the Englishmen and smiled when Lord Lonsfield told him they were both delighted at having so able a man in their service as he was.

After some further conversation it was decided to bury the dead outlaws at once and then push on for the camp-ground where all would remain for the night, as the three rescuers determined that it was best for them to return to Massacre Valley, where they would be joined later by the two Englishmen under a military escort strong enough to allow them to remain there while investigations were made leading to the rescue of the white captives then in the power of the Sioux.

So the dead outlaws were consigned to the grave, and the party pushed on, no longer dreading an attack from The Deserters, who had been so thoroughly beaten and demoralized in their effort to capture the two Englishmen.

That night Lord Lonsfield and Sir John heard all that Trapper Dennis had to tell, and the proofs in Surgeon Powell's possession, and they were more than gratified at having been recalled to the fort for further investigation as to whether Granger Goldhurst was alive or dead.

CHAPTER LVI.

A TRIO OF TRAILERS.

It having been decided that Buffalo Bill, Surgeon Powell and Trapper Dennis should return to the Massacre Valley to await the coming of the two Englishmen, the three brave men, who had come so opportunely to the rescue of Texas Jack and his party, held a council together after their comrades had gone on the way to the fort.

For them to divide forces was of course dangerous, but they felt very certain of meeting again, so it was decided that each one should take a trail of the outlaws and see if they did not come together at some given point.

Trapper Dennis was to go across the river and follow the trail of the men who had been ambushed among the rocks across from the overhanging cliffs.

Surgeon Powell was to pick up the trail of the chief, and Buffalo Bill was to go along past the cliffs and follow after "Corporal" Jerry and his squad of outlaws.

If the trail did not come together by night, then the three trailers were to make for a point which they had noted in following The Deserters from Massacre Valley.

With this understanding they rode back together to the point where the Deserter captain had stood when he held up the Texas Jack party.

Here Trapper Dennis parted with the others and crossed the stream to pick up his trail.

Buffalo Bill rode on to where the rear guard of outlaws had turned in flight, and the Surgeon Scout dismounted and began work right at the hoof-tracks of the Deserter captain's horse.

Trapper Dennis very readily found the foot-tracks of his band to follow, and as he went along he made the comment to himself, with a gratified grin:

"Now they was a-hustling and no mistake."

"If they had only know'd thar was but

three of us they'd have come back and fit it out, I guesses."

After a walk of an eighth of a mile the old trapper came upon the spot where they had hidden their horses.

He smiled grimly as he saw that several of the men had cut their reins in their haste to escape, not stopping to untie them.

"Them fellers was considerable rattled, that are sart'in," he muttered.

All had gone in one direction however, and the trapper, who boasted that he could follow the trail of a wildcat, had no difficulty in following the broad one left by the flying outlaws.

He went along at a lope, where he could see the trail ahead, and was not sure of running upon an ambush, and made a flank movement, or went very slow when he saw a spot on the trail where a foe could hide and pick him off.

The circling around of the trail showed that the outlaws were making for the mountains beyond Massacre Valley again, intending to strike upon their own trail after awhile and follow it back again.

After some hours' following the trail, the trapper came to a ridge that rose to quite a height above the surrounding country.

He was too cautious to follow the trail up to the top, so flanked for a mile, reached the summit and peered over into the valley beyond.

At a glance he recognized it as the place where the trail of the outlaws had branched off toward Overhanging Cliffs, and where they had camped.

"There is just where they are camped now, waiting to be jined by t'others."

"I were a great big lump of wisdom not ter follow ther trail over ther ridge, for they is yonder in ther timber I feel sart'in and would have seen me and no mistake."

"I'll jist lay here on the watch, for maybe the Doc or Bill may be a-walkin' up onto 'em, thinking they has gone on, which they hasn't— Lordy! there be some of 'em now, and a-following right on ther trail I came arter ther fellows, and Buffalo Bill are arter them I'll swear, just like their shadder."

"I'll jist wait until they goes by and then will lie low in ther trail until Buffalo comes along."

With this the trapper watched from his hiding-place for the party of outlaws to pass over the ridge, and when the last one had done so he mounted his horse and made his way back to a position where he could see Buffalo Bill should he be following the others.

"Them is ther party as come in behind Texas Jack and them with him, and they camped all night afore finding the trail of them what has gone on."

"I counted nine horse tracks, but there was two Deserter soldiers less than went into ambush, as I happens to know."

"They camped, too, last night, as I seen on my way, but they wasn't happy a little bit, I reckon."

"Now, whar is Buffalo Bill?"

His question was quickly answered by seeing the scout ride into view half a mile back on the trail.

He came out of a narrow valley, and his quick eyes took in the ridge, the clump of bushes where the trapper was in hiding, and all that lay before him in the way of a place of ambush.

Then he halted and raised his field-glass to his eyes, reviewing the scene most carefully.

"Buffalo are as cautious as a catamount a-hunting his supper," muttered the trapper.

"Yas, and he hain't no fool, nuther, fer he is a goin' ter flank around as I did."

"I'll jist give him a signal that I are ahead of him."

With this, the trapper stepped out into view, and seeing him, Buffalo Bill came forward at a lope.

"Well, old man, you have followed your gang, I see by the trails."

"Yas, Bill, and they is camped two miles over the ridge thar, where your gang has gone to jine them."

"And the surgeon?"

"Has not showed up, or his men either, unless they be already ahead."

"Well, we will camp on the ridge until night, and then reconnoiter," was the scout's reply.

CHAPTER LVII.

NOT AT THE RENDEZVOUS.

The two pards took up a position on the ridge and waited patiently.

They at last descried a party of horsemen coming up the valley, having passed through a gap which Buffalo Bill knew lay miles below.

"Old man?"

"Yas, Bill."

"There come the other outlaws."

"Party Number Three."

"Yas, and there are just three of them."

"The Desarter cap'n and the two who got away with him?"

"Yas."

"Then the camp yonder whar t'others is be the rungdevoo, as you calls it in the French lingo, pard?"

"That is about the size of it, pard."

"Ther Surgeon Scout are on their trail, sure as shooting."

"Without doubt, old man, and he'll not come into view until they are out of the valley, knowing they can see him miles back."

"And it will be dark within an hour?"

"Yas, and the doctor will then come on up to this trail over the ridge, which he knows of, and will then camp, unless he sees their camp-fires."

"You think they will dare light 'em, Bill?"

"Oh, yes, for they will not expect the soldiers, as they supposed us to be, to divide forces and follow them, but go on to the fort as an escort to the Englishmen."

"When they saw that they were not followed last night, they concluded that they would not be at all."

"I guesses you reasons right, Pard Bill; but we must be on hand ter head off the Doc."

"Oh, yes, we will lie in ambush for him as soon as it is dark enough for us to descend into the valley, without being seen ourselves."

"You and he may sling a ounce o' lead into one o' us, for he are lightning on ther shoot, ther Doc is."

"No, we will see him coming, and I have a call he will recognize as mine."

"All right, Bill, I'm with you; but what does yer make out o' them there fellers?"

The scout turned his glass upon the three horsemen, and after a good scrutiny said:

"The one riding ahead is the Deserter captain, for I make out his helmet and shoulder-straps."

"The other two are the men who escaped with him."

"Three thar, six in ther gang you was trailing, and eight of them I was onter, makes seventeen, don't it, Pard Bill."

"Yas, Trapper Dennis."

"Then there was four that turned up their toes."

"Correct."

"Twenty-one of 'em."

"Yas, and with we three, and Jack's eleven, we were fourteen."

"I only wish we had all trailed them, for we could have wiped them out."

"So we could, Bill, only ther darkie, Chips, and ther English sarvant, yer need not count."

"Yas, I will count them, for they would fight with the rest of us."

"As it is, when Surgeon Powell comes, we can give them a scare that will set them to running and leave a few of them behind for us to bury."

"Good! we'll do it."

"No, trapper, it would not be wise."

"Why not, Bill?"

"We do not wish them to know we are following them, and to prevent their finding it out, should they suspect us and leave a scout in their rear, we can ride faster than they do, head them off at the mountain where we first saw their trail and wait for them to go by."

"They will not look for any one to be following them and we can trail them right to their stronghold, don't you sec, and when Captain Taylor comes to Massacre Valley with his troop as an escort to the Englishmen, we can lead him by night upon the retreat of the Deserters and wipe them out."

"Buffalo Bill."

"Yas."

"You have a great big head, you have?"

"As big a head as you had, Dennis, after your supper in Chicago."

"Go slow on that trail, Bill, for I don't want ter git ter laughing, as I'll fergit and whoop 'em up."

"Don't do it, old man, if you prize your scalp; but do you know I rather think when we get hold of the Deserter captain we will find a man who is also a renegade, a white chief of the Sioux."

"Shouldn't wonder a bit, Bill."

"See, they have gone into the timber now, and it will soon be dark, so we can ride down into the valley and head Doc off."

"If they light a camp-fire then we will know just where to find them."

After a few minutes more they went for their horses, and mounting rode down into the valley, going along the trail they had seen the Deserter captain and his two men take.

Finding a good place for an ambush they halted there and waited for the coming of the Surgeon Scout.

But the time slipped by and he did not appear.

An hour, two hours passed and both Buffalo Bill and Trapper Dennis began to grow uneasy at the non-appearance of Frank Powell.

Did it mean that he had been led into an ambush and killed?

Buffalo Bill did not think so, though Trapper Dennis did, and the old man was terribly anxious about the Surgeon Scout and said:

"I guesses, Bill, ther Doc hev turned up his toes."

"No, old man, Doctor Powell is not a man to ride into an ambush, and though I feel anxious about him, I still think he has made some important discovery which has prevented his coming to the rendezvous."

But the night passed away and still Frank Powell did not appear at the rendezvous.

CHAPTER LVIII.

THE SURGEON SCOUT'S DISCOVERY.

When the dawn came and Frank Powell did not appear, there was anxiety on the face of Buffalo Bill which no danger to himself could have brought there.

"Well, Dennis, I see but one way out of this," he said.

"You had better follow the outlaws on to their den, being careful to mark the trail so that we can take it readily in leading the soldiers to attack them."

"Yes, Bill."

"You can note the advantages and disadvantages of a night march upon them, and an attack under cover of the darkness."

"I see."

"Then return to your own den in the island, and I will try and be there by the time you get back from your trail of The Deserters."

"Yes, and what does you do?"

"I shall go back on this trail to see what has become of the surgeon."

"Well?"

"If I find him I will hasten on with him after you."

"If not?"

"I will know what has happened to him, and if he is dead, I will go on to the fort and so report to Colonel Loyal, after which I will guide Captain Taylor's command with the Englishmen up to meet you, and we will avenge Frank Powell in a way that will drive any outlaw off of this frontier."

"We will, pard, for a fact."

"Now I am ready to start."

Soon after the two men grasped hands, and mounting their horses, rode away in opposite directions, Trapper Dennis taking the led horse with him, as before.

The chief of scouts followed back on the trail left by the Deserter captain and his men, and watched it closely all along.

He had gone some ten miles, when he came to a trail branching off from it.

There were the tracks of a horse following to that point, and then branching away to the right.

Dismounting, Buffalo Bill began to study the situation slowly.

"Yes, these tracks were made by Surgeon Powell's horse, surely."

"He has branched off here for some reason."

"Now, why?"

For some time the scout was lost in deep thought, and then said:

"Now, it is just this way:

"Frank took chances on the head of this valley being the rallying point of The Deserters, and that then they would start westward in a body."

"Now, branching off here will lead him to the trail we followed on our trip after them, and that is the way they will go back, beyond all doubt."

"By getting on the trail ahead of them, Frank can see them pass and note just what they are, from some point of ambush."

"Then he will expect us to follow on, hoping he will overtake us, and thus can meet Trapper Dennis and myself."

"But he did not take into consideration our anxiety about his not coming to join us, and that I would at once set out to see why he did not come, never entered his head."

"Now to go on after him."

With this decision Buffalo Bill rode on at a canter, readily following the trail left by the Surgeon Scout.

It was just noon when he came to a range, heavily wooded, and through which a narrow canyon made its way.

The trail they had followed the Deserters on went through this canyon, and Buffalo Bill knew that he would either find Trapper Dennis there, or their trail, if they had passed, or discover that he had gone on after them.

As he neared the trail he was very cautious.

He soon saw that The Deserters had gone by, and some hours before.

He also noted the tracks of the trapper's two horses, and saw where Frank Powell had ridden down into the canyon from the range.

Going on this trail he soon came to where the Surgeon Scout had been in hiding, and the position commanded a full view of the canyon.

"All have gone along," muttered the scout, and then he went also along the trail.

At the other end of the canyon the trails of two horses were visible.

"Ah! one of these is Frank's trail, and it has followed this nigh track to the right—Ha!"

He started as he suddenly saw a horseman ride into view.

It was the Surgeon Scout and the two devoted friends had soon clasped hands.

"Well, Doc, what have you been up to?"

"I cut off, Bill, knowing they would come this way, and that trail there was I ft by the horse of the Deserter captain."

"I followed it far enough to know that its destination is the fort, or its vicinity, and so came back to meet you and say that I would go on after it, for I believe I may make a discovery at the other end, while you and Dennis track the outlaws."

"I will join you later in the mountains; but now my heart is set upon following the Deserter captain."

CHAPTER LIX.

ON THE TRACK OF THE CHIEF.

BUFFALO BILL saw that the Surgeon Scout had some good motive for wishing to go on the trail of the Deserter captain while he went on after the outlaw band.

So he made no objection and the two had their noonday meal together.

"I saw them all pass from up on the range there, Bill, and the Deserter captain led, some distance ahead of his men, and wearing his helmet with the visor down, as though he did not wish to be known even to his men."

"I saw them halt and have a short talk, when the men, under a man wearing sergeant's stripes, rode on and the chief branched off on the trail I followed."

Soon after Trapper Dennis came in sight following the trail, but I dared not call to him, so let him go by, supposing you were behind him."

"I then followed the Deserter chief's trail for miles, and saw that he took through the valley which must lead him to the fort."

"Then I came back to head you off, or follow on, and tell you that it was my intention to stick to that man's trail and see just where it would lead."

"I think you are right, Frank, for he may be some one of whom we little dream, and who lives in the fort."

"That is just my idea, Bill, so you go on and find the retreat of the outlaws and await our coming at the trapper's den, while I will come there with Captain Taylor."

This being arranged the two friends parted, Buffalo Bill hastening on to overtake Trapper Dennis and relieve his mind about the Surgeon Scout, while the latter went on at a canter following the Deserter captain.

He kept his rapid pace up to where he had turned back from the trail and then after a short rest, began to follow the tracks of the Deserter's horse as rapidly as he was able from the nature of the ground.

At night he camped, when too late to push on further, and then he felt sure he was not very far behind the man he was on the track of.

Bright and early the following morning he was on the trail again and, sticking to it steadily, soon after noon saw that the tracks led to the fort surely.

He smiled grimly at this discovery, and said to himself:

"Not so smart as he thinks he is."

The trail led directly to the stockade gate, and seeing this Frank Powell went into camp within full view of the fort, hiding however from the view of the sentinel, until dark, for he did not wish to be seen coming in on the trail he had so persistently followed.

As soon as night fell the Surgeon Scout mounted his horse and rode on.

He was saluted by the sentinel as he entered, and asked in a casual way:

"Any one come in by this gate to-day, sentinel, who has been absent for some days?"

"Not while I have been on duty, sir; but the other sentinel might know."

So Frank Powell sought the officer of the day and made certain inquiries which caused that officer to send for the sentinels and question them.

The satisfaction he gained thereby caused him to leave the guard-house with a smile upon his handsome face, and seek his own quarters.

Having made his toilet, he went to report to Colonel Loyal, and received a very warm welcome, as his coming was wholly unexpected to the commandant.

For some time he was engaged in conversation with the colonel, and what passed between them both seemed to be satisfied with.

His next visit, late as it was, he made to the quarters of Lord Lonsfield and Sir John Reeder, who were surprised and delighted at his coming.

The three talked together for a long time, and before they parted it was decided that the start should be made the following night for the mountains in the hope of finding some clew to the prisoners in the power of the Sioux.

The next morning a council was held with Colonel Loyal and the two Englishmen, at which Captain Taylor, Surgeon Powell and Lieutenant Onderdonk were present.

The result of this council was that Captain Taylor's troop was to be ready for the march that night, Texas Jack and ten scouts going along also, with a complete outfit for a long stay if necessary.

Surgeon Powell was to go both as surgeon of the command and as scout, but he expressed a desire to remain after the departure of the droopers and follow the next day, and the permission was readily given by the colonel.

With the captain's troop and Texas Jack and his ten scouts, the force would number seventy-five men, exclusive of the two Englishmen, their servant Blazer, Chips and Crow, and Buffalo Bill and Trapper Dennis up in the mountains.

"With over eighty men we will have nothing to fear," Captain Taylor said.

That night the command moved quietly out of the fort on their perilous march, and Surgeon Powell, to carry out some plan of his own, remained behind, but to follow later on the trail of the soldiers.

CHAPTER LX.

THE RETURN OF THE DON.

JUST prior to the coming back to the fort of Surgeon Powell, there had been an arrival which created more excitement.

This was none other than the return of Don Eduardo Vincente, the Mexican sport and gentleman of leisure.

He returned with a strange story, too, regarding the Belle of the Border, Bessie Bond.

It was to the effect that she had gone, accompanied by her mother, to Mexico, there to become the wife of Captain Leon Luiz, a gentleman whom she had met in Texas some time before, and fallen in love with, as he had with her.

They had been recently engaged, and the Mexican had come after her, to make her his wife; but there was some clause connected with his inheritance, he explained, which left him his fortune upon conditions.

These conditions were, in effect:

"That he should marry no one out of Mexico."

This was known to mean that he should wed none but a Mexican woman; but its peculiar wording gave him a chance to marry the one of his choice, an American girl, if she would only go to Mexico with him and there, on Mexican soil, be made his wife.

This Bessie Bond had consented to do, and the result had been that they had started thither, Captain Luiz, his Texas friend the King of the Rope, Don Eduardo Vincente as "best man," and Mrs. Bond and Bessie.

But upon reaching Mexican soil, Captain Luiz had been arrested as a conspirator, and Bessie Bond found that she had been deceived in many ways regarding him, and so determined to at once give him up forever, and return to her home, Ranch Isle.

This they had done, the Don acting as their escort, he said, and Bessie was to live the life of a fair hermit on her island home.

Such was the romantic story told by Don Eduardo Vincente upon his return, and having always been most friendly with the Mexican, Surgeon Powell called upon him at his quarters in the settlement, to welcome him back, and hear the romance from his own lips.

Having passed a couple of hours very pleasantly with Don Eduardo, Surgeon Powell went to the quarters of the chaplain and asked to see Mustang Madge the Daughter of the Fifth.

Upon her, also, he made a long call, after which he went and bade farewell to Colonel Loyal, with whom he had a private interview.

Excepting to make these three visits there seemed no reason for the surgeon's remaining behind Captain Taylor's command to follow on alone.

He started on the trail of the troopers soon after leaving Colonel Loyal's quarters, and rode rapidly on, hoping to catch up with them in their camp that night.

In this he was successful, for the command had traveled by slow marches, while the Surgeon Scout had ridden rapidly, and before the camp had settled down to slumber, he rode up and was challenged by the sentinel.

He found the two Englishmen, Captain Taylor and Lieutenant Onderdonk chatting together, and met with a hearty welcome.

He had no more to say than that he had accomplished his purpose, whatever it was, in remaining behind the command, and was glad to have been able to overtake them so soon.

"To-morrow I will ride on ahead and see if I can catch Cody and the trapper in their den, Captain Taylor, for you know the old man's retreat is unknown, excepting to Bill and myself, and he wishes it to so remain," said the Surgeon Scout.

"Certainly, Powell, and we will respect his wishes," was the response of Captain Taylor.

The next morning the Surgeon Scout started half an hour ahead of the command, and rode at about double the speed of the troopers.

He had told Texas Jack where to camp and await his coming, should he be detained.

Pushing rapidly on he at last reached the valley through which the stream ran, and found the rock-walled island in the center of which the trapper had made his home.

He cautiously approached the secret entrance among the bushes, and made his way into the cavern and thus on into the island.

The barrier across the inner entrance to the cavern was up, and this told him that

either Buffalo Bill or the trapper had returned.

Soon after he saw the horses of both of them feeding some distance off, and riding on soon reached the cabin.

There sat the two men, Buffalo Bill and Trapper Dennis awaiting him, for they had noticed his coming as soon as he rode out of the cavern.

"Well, Doc, I am glad to see you, for I did not know just how that lone trail of yours was going to pan out."

"Yas, it's so easy for a man ter lie by and knock another over who is following on his trail," Trapper Dennis added.

"Well, Bill, my trail panned out well, in fact, I struck it rich, as you will decide when you hear what I have done; but first I wish to hear if you and Trapper Dennis made any discoveries?" and having taking the saddle and bridle off his horse the scout sat down near his companions.

CHAPTER LXI.

THE THREE TRAILERS.

THE chief of scouts felt certain, by noting the look and manner of Surgeon Powell, that he had made some important discovery, and was anxious to know what it was, so said:

"Come, Trapper Dennis, let us hear all about your trail, then I will tell my story, and the Doc will give in his experience, as they say in church."

"I hain't got much ter tell, save that I followed them outlaws clean up inter ther mountains, and seen just which way they hunted fer cover."

"Then I waited for Buffalo Bill ter come up, and we put our heads tergether and decided ter push right along on the trail."

"Waal, we did so, and Bill kin tell yer what we found at the end of the trail, Pard Doc."

"Well, Bill, out with it," said the Surgeon Scout.

"I found the trapper had gotten his end of the line down fine pard, for he had tracked The Deserters as far as he could go alone."

"We decided that we could push on together, however, and we did so."

"As it began to be too risky to go on horseback, we hid the animals in a snug place, and pushed along on foot."

"Well, Doc, the fellows were so certain that they would not be found that they made no effort whatever to hide their trail."

"They seemed to feel that their retreat being within such easy call of the Indian villages, that nothing less than an army would dare follow them there."

"The result was that it was very easy work following their trail, especially as the trapper and myself were on foot, and we went right up into their stronghold."

"Good!"

"Yes, we found them encamped upon a ridge, with but two approaches, one from the rear, leading down into a valley where they kept their horses, and another the way we tracked them."

"Unless a surprise it would be hard to attack them there, and my advice would be to flank them, capture their horses, and then go on up in their rear, while a small force could go the way we went, to advance and then hem them in."

"That would be a good idea, but did you get at their force, Bill?"

"I suppose there are a couple of dozen of them in the camp, and perhaps three or four hundred horses."

"How did you get there?"

"Oh, we went by night, and dodged about the camp within easy rifle-range, if they had but known it, while we also went over into the valley where they keep their horses."

"They have a large number, you say?"

"Yes, and corral them at night right at the foot of the ridge, and let them roam by day, with a couple of drovers to watch them."

"You was there for some time then?"

"A day and a night, for we only got back this morning."

"Well, The Deserters are doomed, that is certain."

"We will have to make the dash by night, and get away quickly, for they are not ten miles from the Indian village, and while we were there a number of warriors went there to visit them."

"This looks bad, for the village could

throw a very large force of warriors upon us, did we not make our attack a complete surprise."

"They would indeed, Pard Frank."

"Now, how long will it take us to ride to their retreat, rear and front?"

"We can go to the place where we left our horses, and wait until night."

"Then three hours' ride will get us to the retreat, an hour will finish up the work we go on, and by daylight we can be back in Massacre Valley again, when, should we be pursued we can make a stand at Trapper's Mound and with our force beat off a thousand warriors."

"Then we had best lose no time, for we do not wish to remain longer in the country than we have to, Bill."

"But what will we do about those white captives, Frank?"

"That will come later, Bill, for if we get those Deserters into our power we can make terms with the Indians."

"I am not so sure of that, Surgeon Powell."

"I am," was the dry response of the surgeon.

"Then you know something you have not yet told us?"

"Yes, but I will tell you when I can do so, though it is a secret to be kept from all others excepting you and Trapper Dennis, as we are not sure who may be a spy in our camp and give warning so as to destroy the plot I have in view."

"We will be as silent as a pair of graves, won't we, old man?"

"You bet we will," was the earnest response of the old trapper.

Having had several hours' rest, and eaten dinner, the three trailers started to join the troopers at the rendezvous appointed by Buffalo Bill with Texas Jack.

While waiting, the Surgeon Scout had made known to Buffalo Bill and Trapper Dennis just what discoveries he had made, and that they were considered most valuable there was not the slightest doubt, to judge from the faces of the two men as they listened to all that the doctor had to tell.

CHAPTER LXII.

THE SURPRISE.

THE troopers were found encamped just where Buffalo Bill had directed Texas Jack to go, and the scouts of the latter were then out on a search for any signs of roving Indians, who might discover their trail and give the alarm.

After a short talk with Captain Taylor, when Buffalo Bill made known just where the retreat of The Deserters was, and how it could be reached, it was decided to at once march to the place where the two scouts had hidden their horses, and there remain in hiding until the following night, when they would make a dash for the ridge where the outlaws made their home.

This they did, and reaching the place, the troopers were kept close in camp, while the scouts went on a circuit about it.

Thus the night and day passed, and if a single Indian had discovered the large trail of the troopers, and given the alarm, the scouts had not found it out.

When night came, the command was divided, Captain Taylor taking two thirds of his men, with Buffalo Bill as guide, and Surgeon Powell accompanying them, and going up the narrow valley to flank the outlaws' retreat.

The remainder of the force, with Trapper Dennis as guide, was to go to the retreat by the trail The Deserters had taken to their camp.

In the troopers' camp half a dozen soldiers, several scouts, the three servants and the pack-horses, all under command of Texas Jack, were to be left, and in case of a pursuit by the Indians in heavy force these would serve as a reserve force, and perhaps give the impression to the red-skins that there were a large number of troopers there.

So the command divided into three parties, Lord Lonsfield and Sir John Reeder going with the attacking force under Captain Taylor.

On they went through the darkness, their accouterments muffled to prevent any more sound than was necessary, and keeping at a rapid trot.

The other force under Lieutenant Onder-

donk was to reach the ridge at a certain time and be ready to cut off all retreat.

When the valley was reached, Buffalo Bill, Surgeon Powell and several scouts dismounted and went on ahead.

They found the corral and there were hundreds of horses in it.

A scout was sent back to order up the troopers, and they were soon on hand, and the ascent of the ridge was begun.

There was the glimmer of firelight, against the tree-tops, showing that some of the outlaws were yet awake, and creeping forward Buffalo Bill discovered a party of them playing cards.

The scout knew that Lieutenant Onderdonk's party must be in position, so he told a scout to bring up Captain Taylor and his men.

There was even no guard kept, so secure did the outlaws feel in their retreat almost under the shadow of the villages of the Sioux.

But the horses at last were heard, and the outlaws engaged in gambling sprung to their feet in alarm.

Just then the bugle rung out loudly, sounding a charge, and the troopers dashed into the outlaw camp.

The order had been given to take the outlaws alive, if possible, so loud commands were given to surrender.

But the amazed, terrified and desperate men knew that surrender meant death at the rope-end, and so opened fire upon their foes, after which they made a dash down the ridge in flight.

But there they ran upon Lieutenant Onderdonk and his men, and at last, brought to bay, half a dozen of them cried for mercy.

These were quickly made prisoners, and with the dead and wounded, soldiers and outlaws alike, thrown across the backs of horses, the retreat was begun, the commands going back divided, as they had come.

The horses of the outlaws, some three hundred in number, and nearly all of them fine animals, stolen from the fort, stage-stations and ranches, were driven down the valley ahead of the troopers.

It was sunrise when the two parties met at the spot where those under Texas Jack awaited them, and then all pushed ahead for Massacre Valley.

It was known that some of the outlaws had escaped, and that they would soon warn the Sioux and bring half a thousand braves upon their heels.

Of course, after the hard ride given the horses, they would have to halt in the Massacre Valley for rest, and at Trapper's Mound could make a successful stand.

"I have a favor to ask, Captain Taylor," said Surgeon Powell, as they approached the Trapper's Mound.

"Granted, Powell," was the ready reply.

"These captured horses are not near so tired as ours, and I would like to take the pick of them, with the prisoners and wounded, and a guard of half a dozen soldiers and several scouts, and push right on for the fort, for I can state the case to Colonel Loyal, and he can send a force, with a couple of guns to your aid."

"A good idea, doctor."

"And besides, I have a plan to reap a great success out of the capture of this Deserter band, for through them I can, I believe, secure the white captives."

"Then go, by all means, Powell," was the earnest response of the captain.

CHAPTER LXIII.

AN UNKNOWN PLOT.

The party under the Surgeon Scout rode at as brisk a pace as possible toward the fort, while the main command took position under Captain Taylor, to check any pursuit of the red skins.

That he could hold his own with perfect safety against big odds, in a position such as he had in the Trapper's Mound, the captain felt perfectly certain.

He had fought off before, in that very place, a large number of Indians, and when he had lost one-third of the number of soldiers then under his command.

So he at once went into camp, to stay as long as he deemed necessary.

He felt that there was good to come out of the capture of The Deserters, that the Sioux would see their pale face allies, the band of

outlaws, wiped out, and would, when at tempting to avenge them, receive a severe lesson themselves.

By the capture of some one or more of the Sioux chiefs, terms might be arranged for the exchange for them of the white captives then held in the Indian villages, among whom it was now certain was the lost heir, Granger Goldhurst and his family.

Although Surgeon Powell had not made known his exact plan, or idea, regarding the prisoners taken, Captain Taylor seemed to feel that he had some plot for good, and was glad to have him carry it out in his own way.

Then, too, being besieged himself, Captain Taylor felt that the arrival of a force, with a couple of guns, would stampede the Indians and severely punish them.

So he went into camp at Trapper's Mound, with the intention to fight it out, while Surgeon Powell pushed on for the fort with the outlaw prisoners and the wounded soldiers who were able to travel.

In his expectation of being besieged Captain Taylor was not disappointed, for Surgeon Powell and his squad had not been gone a couple of hours when the scouts reported Indians approaching, and by nightfall hundreds of mounted braves surrounded Trapper's Mound.

In the mean while the Surgeon Scout pushed on, and arriving near the fort he left the command to go into camp while he went on alone.

He arrived after nightfall of the following day, and at once sought the colonel's headquarters.

"Well, Powell, are the men in trouble again?" anxiously asked the colonel, when he saw the surgeon appear.

"Oh, no, sir, not any trouble they cannot get out of, sir; but I came back to make a report to you, sir, of the capture of The Deserters' stronghold and several hundred horses."

"Half of the outlaws were killed, but the others were captured, some of them wounded, though two or more escaped."

"This is good news, indeed, Surgeon Powell; but has Captain Taylor remained up in the Indian country where the haunt of these outlaws was?"

"No, sir, he retreated at once to Trapper's Mound, for the outlaws, as you know, were the allies of the Sioux?"

"Yes."

"And those who escaped capture or death at once ran for the Sioux camps, so that a large force of braves came in pursuit of us."

"And Captain Taylor halted at the Trapper's Mound to fight?"

"Yes, sir, while I came on to ask you, Colonel Loyal, to send a force with a couple of light guns to his relief, that the Indians might be stampeded and severely punished."

"Certainly, I will start them at once; but does not this getting into trouble with the Indians break in upon the object of the expedition, to rescue their white captives?"

"No, sir, it aids us."

"May I ask how?"

"I brought with me, sir, the wounded soldiers, and outlaw prisoners."

"Ah!"

"They are now in camp ten miles away, while I came on to ask you, sir, to allow me to work out a little plot which Buffalo Bill and I have decided upon."

"You certainly may do as you deem best, for well I know what it is to allow you and Cody to have your own way, Surgeon Powell."

"Thank you, sir, and I think I can promise you success in the end; but will you send for Don Eduardo Vincente and ask him to return with me to serve Captain Taylor as a volunteer aide-de-camp?"

"Ask Don Eduardo Vincente to do this?" said the colonel, in surprise.

"Yes, sir, for I have a motive for it which I cannot now explain, other than to say that the Don will be of immense service to us, and I know of a certain influence which he holds."

"I do not understand this request, Surgeon Powell, but I will do as you say, for I know you must have good reasons for making it."

"I have, sir, and I would like the Don to

start back at once with me, the reinforcements following later."

"You shall have your way, Doctor Powell," said the colonel with a smile, mystified by the request of the officer.

"Thank you, sir."

"I will at once send for the Don," and the orderly was accordingly dispatched to the cabin of Don Eduardo.

He was not found there, but was discovered making a call upon Mustang Madge, and came at once to the colonel's headquarters.

"Don Eduardo, I have sent for you, as I have a favor to ask."

"Granted, Colonel Loyal, of course," was the polite reply of the Mexican.

"The news brought me by Surgeon Powell is that Captain Taylor is facing a force of red-skins up in Massacre Valley, and I intend to send reinforcements to him."

"But the surgeon returns at once, and asks for an officer to serve as an aide to Captain Taylor, but not able to send one just now, I beg to request that you serve as a volunteer staff officer for the occasion."

The Mexican seemed delighted with the honor thus conferred upon him, and promptly accepted the position of aide.

CHAPTER LXIV.

A CLEVER CAPTURE.

HAVING accepted the position as volunteer aide-de-camp, Don Eduardo at once went to his quarters to prepare to start with Surgeon Powell back to the Massacre Valley.

Talking the matter over with the Don and Surgeon Powell, Colonel Loyal decided to send two companies of mounted infantry, three troops of cavalry and a couple of six-pounders to the support of Captain Taylor, to leave the fort just at dawn.

The Don was to take his "shadow" as his man Amigo was called, and Surgeon Powell would have returned with him in addition to them two a couple of scouts and as many soldier couriers.

It was just midnight when the little advance party rode out of the fort, the Don and the surgeon riding side by side, Amigo following and the two scouts and soldiers bringing up the rear.

They rode briskly along, their way lighted by the moon, and Surgeon Powell chatted pleasantly with the Don, until suddenly, as they were crossing a bit of open prairie the officer reined up his horse, and suddenly wheeled upon the Don, a revolver in his hand and leveled full at the man whom he addressed in words that were full of meaning.

At the same moment the two soldiers covered the Don with their carbines, while the two scouts held Amigo under the muzzles of their revolvers.

"Don Eduardo Vincente, you are my prisoner, and a dead man, if you offer the slightest show of resistance."

"Your man is also covered, so submit."

So spoke Surgeon Powell, and the man he addressed turned to the hue of death.

Had there been the slightest chance for him, it was in his face to resist.

But he knew Frank Powell too well.

He was aware that he faced a man whose aim never failed, a man who would kill him on the instant did he make the slightest movement to indicate resistance.

He saw that his man was also held powerless to act, and so his mind was quickly made up.

He would try a game of bluff.

So he said in his sarcastic way:

"If this is intended as a joke, Surgeon Powell, I fail to see the humor in it."

"It is not intended as a joke, Don Eduardo, but as the sternest reality you ever confronted."

"Hands up, sir!"

"Do you mean it?"

"Hands up, sir!" roared the Surgeon Scout, and his eyes were ablaze with anger.

Quickly the Don obeyed, raising his hands above his head.

"Put the irons on that man!" and the surgeon addressed one of the soldiers, who quickly obeyed.

"Now disarm him."

This was done.

"Now the other man."

Amigo was also disarmed and ironed, and the surgeon at once rode on the way again.

As he did so, he kept Don Eduardo by his side, and said in a low, but very determined voice:

"Don Eduardo Vincente, who you are in reality, I neither know or care; but I do know that you are no Mexican."

"It is false, I—"

"I know that you are no Mexican, and I have tracked you to the end of your trail."

"I happen to know that you came to Fort Beauvoir as a spy."

"I know that you are an American, a fugitive from justice and a renegade."

"You have lived for a long while among the Indians, and are a chief of the Sioux tribe."

"You got tired of the life you led in the Indian camps, and so joined the outlaw band of Deserters, or you organized them, for about that I am not certain."

"You then became bolder in playing your game for gold, and came to the fort as a Mexican gentleman, when you were really a spy."

"As such you have been enabled, trusted as you have been as a supposed gentleman, to make attacks upon the coaches and wagon-trains, as well as upon the settlements, thus reaping a golden harvest for yourself and your outlaw band."

"It is false! utterly false!"

"What your connection is with the widow and her daughter of Ranch Isle, I do not know, but I do not, cannot believe that you are known to them for what you are."

"In fact I believe that you led them to Mexico, in the hope of making some capital out of them, so I take them out of the case, separate them from you wholly."

"As for you, I know that you led the attack upon the two English gentlemen, and very nearly captured them."

"This is an infamous charge."

"I am no fool, Don Eduardo, and can read a trail."

"Your trail I followed to the very fort, and I have since gotten possession of the helmet you wore as a mask, and your uniform."

"I know that you led the attack on the Englishmen, and I tracked you there to your den."

"I got the colonel to ask you to serve as a volunteer aide to Captain Taylor to bring you here and capture you."

"I have you in my power, your man Amigo, also, and I have not far from here a camp where you will find those of your band who are not killed, and they are my prisoners."

"Now, Don Eduardo, the Deserter captain, I think we have made a very clever capture, and you have reached the end of your rope."

CHAPTER LXV.

BROUGHT TO TERMS.

THE prisoner's face was of a deathly hue, and his eyes were sunken, his lips set.

At last he felt that he had indeed come to the end of his rope.

He looked at Surgeon Powell as he ceased speaking, and then said in a voice no longer firm:

"You say that you have captured the outlaw band known as Deserters?"

"Yes."

"When?"

"Very lately, as you must know, as you parted with them to go to the fort, while they went on to their retreat."

"Where?"

"In the mountains, near the Head Village of the Sioux, and where you hold wonderful power as a medicine chief."

"It is false."

"If you take any pleasure in thinking so you will soon see your men, and know that they were tracked to their lair by Buffalo Bill and then the troops were guided thither by the chief of scouts."

"We advanced by the canyon and the valley, at night, captured your horses, all of them stolen animals, and all but two or three of your men, who escaped, were killed or made prisoners."

"Those who escaped went to the Sioux village, and brought a large force of warriors on our track, but while Captain Taylor and his soldiers halted at Trapper's

Mound in the Massacre Valley to stand them off, I came on with the prisoners and the wounded."

"I left them in camp while I went on to the fort and got hold of you."

"Now you see just how you stand."

"Show me the camp."

"I soon will do so, and when you know there is no doubt, then I have terms to offer you."

"Name them now."

"Well, I might just as well do so."

"You are a chief of vast influence in the Sioux tribe, though you are a renegade white man."

"You know that the Sioux hold certain white captives there, and I shall have you send a couple of your men to the village to get them."

"They will not give them up."

"They will if I threaten to scalp you and send you thus to their camp if they refuse, or deliver you up in safety, unharmed, in exchange for those white captives."

"Who are they?"

"You know full well that this lost heir, Granger Goldhurst, his wife and child are prisoners there."

The prisoner was silent after they came in sight of the camp which the Surgeon Scout had left before.

They were greeted with a cheer as they rode up, and the head of Don Eduardo drooped as he beheld the outlaw prisoners, and he said in a low tone:

"Let us talk apart, for I have something to say to you."

The Surgeon Scout conducted the prisoner aside, and then he said:

"See here, Surgeon Powell, I have always felt that I had cause to fear you and Buffalo Bill, of all men, and now I am wholly in your power, and wish to make terms."

"That is just what I desire, Don Eduardo, so say what you wish."

"Well, I will have to make a confession, and then offer terms."

"I am ready to hear all, and will call witnesses."

"No, I will say what I wish only to you."

"Be it so."

"I wish to say that I am a spy of The Deserters, yet not their chief."

"Who that chief is I need only say to you that it is the Mexican, Captain Leon Luiz, whom Miss Bessie Bond so nearly was led to marry, but found out in time his true character."

"Loving her myself I would not see her sacrificed upon him, and so I arranged that she should know the truth, and she and her mother returned with me."

"Believing you to be an honorable man?"

"Oh, yes."

"But who saved her from Leon Luiz, to make her your wife?"

"Of course, Surgeon Powell."

"I am glad to have saved her from a man whom I regard as bad as I do the Mexican captain."

"Thank you."

"Where is this man?"

"In prison in Mexico, for he was a conspirator, and will be executed."

"His fate will be no worse than your own; in fact not so bad, as I shall see to it that your punishment shall be of the severest kind."

"If we do not make terms."

"Can we?"

"Certainly."

"Well, let me hear what you have to offer?"

"You believe that the lost heir, Granger Goldhurst, is a prisoner in the camp of the Sioux?"

"Yes."

"It is not so."

"How do you know?"

"I know, and that is enough."

"Where is he?"

"Dead!"

"You are sure?"

"I am, for he died in the Indian camp."

"And then?"

"You believe his wife, child and her brother are in the Sioux village, as captives?"

"I do."

"Well, they were, but the wife died of a broken heart, the brother was killed in making his escape from the Indians, and—"

"Go on."

"Well, his child was aided to escape by the brother of her mother, and when they were discovered, he turned the horse she rode loose upon the prairie, after tying her to the saddle, while he tried to check the pursuit of the Indians, and, as I said, was killed."

"And the child?" quickly asked Surgeon Powell.

"Oh! that is my secret, and it is worth my life and freedom," was the response of the prisoner, and he gave a triumphant laugh which grated harshly upon the ears of the Surgeon Scout.

CHAPTER LXVI.

THE COMPROMISE.

"WELL, Don Eduardo, you were to offer terms, so say what you wish, and I will quickly answer what I will do," said Surgeon Powell, after a short pause, when he had heard the last words uttered by the prisoner.

"I demand my life and freedom, and that is all, except that I promise to go away from here, never to return again."

"Of course, as an officer of The Deserters, I would be their captain, Leon Luiz being dead; but they are, as I see with my own eyes, wiped out, and having told you what I am, I could not hope to win Bessie Bond now."

"So you see, it will be best for me to go my way, and never trouble this part of the country again."

"And you consider that your secret is worth your life, worth that I should set you free, you, an avowed outlaw?"

"I think that it is," was the cool reply.

Then the man quickly added:

"And that is not all."

"What else?"

"You hold in my pard, Amigo, a man who is innocent of wrong."

"He knows that I am guilty of doing some secret work that pays me well, but he is innocent, I pledge you my word, and I know would be glad to remain at the fort and seek service of some kind."

"So I demand also that he be set free, and be allowed to go back with you as a free man, one whom to arrest was a mistake."

"For myself I can only say, put the blame all upon me, for it there belongs, but not upon him, and hence I demand his pardon with my own, and as I have gotten him into trouble, will give him my cabin, horses and traps, while I go my way alone."

"It is certainly manly in you to exonerate him, and I will consider your request; but thus far you have done nothing to save your own neck from the gallows, but rather told that which will hang you."

"Well, what do you demand?"

"You are a renegade chief of the Sioux?"

"I need not deny what you appear to know, that I am a medicine-chief of the Sioux."

"You hold vast influence with them?"

"No one holds more."

"Your word would release every captive they hold in their village?"

"Every one."

"You will bargain your life and pardon for those captives?"

"I will."

"And confess what you know as to the child of Granger Goldhurst?"

"Must I do that?"

"You must."

"Well."

"You will?"

"I will."

"Now, when I have the child of Granger Goldhurst in my care, and the captives now in the Sioux village, I will set you free and allow you to go your way."

"Have you the power to do so?"

"I have, for that was why I brought you from the fort under my protection, as I knew that once you were in the power of Colonel Loyal you could make no terms with him."

"You were wise, and I will trust you; but what is to be done?"

"You are aware that Captain Taylor has sent reinforcements, and they are but a few hours behind us?"

"Yes."

"They will drive the Sioux in defeat back to their villages, and then it will be an ugly time to ask the pardon of those white captives."

"Very true."

"So my plan is to go to the Indian village, or near, with you."

"Alone?"

"Oh no, for Buffalo Bill, Texas Jack, Trapper Dennis and a dozen good scouts, who know how to penetrate the Indian country, will accompany me."

"And I will go along?"

"Yes, and your man Amigo."

"Well?"

"How can you communicate with the Indians?"

"Through my men, now your prisoners."

"Then select two of them, send them to the Sioux village with your orders, with instructions to say that you are a prisoner and your scalp will be sent to the village unless the white captives return with them."

"Tell them where to join you, and the moment they return with the captives you shall be set free, and go your way."

"And Amigo?"

"Can go with you, or back to the fort."

"And the two men who go to the Indian village?"

"They shall go to prison, thus escaping with their lives, for their comrades shall hang."

"You will be merciful at least and not imprison them for life?"

"I will ask for a term of five years for them: but remember, they are to know nothing of this."

"Of course not; but what else?"

"You are to tell me first where to find the child of the dead heir, Granger Goldhurst."

"Suppose I do not."

"Then you do not go free."

"Not even if I release the white captives?"

"Not under any circumstances save the giving up of this child, and the release of the captives."

"Then I can only do as you demand, Surgeon Powell."

"And will secure the captives for me?"

"Yes."

"And the child of Granger Goldhurst?"

"Did it ever strike you that she is no longer a child?"

"True, it was years ago."

"She is a young woman now and in the fort she is known as Mustang Madge the Daughter of the Fifth," and as the man uttered the words Surgeon Powell gave vent to a yell that fairly startled the camp.

CHAPTER LXVII.

STAMPEDE.

DON EDUARDO VINCENTE, as the outlaw was pleased to call himself, was also startled by the yell, ending in a perfect war-whoop, uttered by the Surgeon Scout.

"You seem pleased at the secret you have forced from me?" the outlaw said with a sneer.

"I am, and if you had half a dozen lives I would have given them to you to know what you have just told me."

"I am glad you prize the information so highly."

"I do for several reasons, one in particular being a desire on the part of a few women to snub Mustang Madge, as there was nothing known of her antecedents, and another because the little woman deserves all there is in store for her."

"Now let me know just how you wish to carry out your plan to release the white captives in the Sioux village?"

"You will find no others of the Goldhurst family there."

"Granted, but it will be a blessing to release those who are there, be they whom they may."

"I know of no other better plan than yours."

"All right, select your two men."

"They must not know that I am a prisoner."

"As for that, they must, for I shall not take the irons off of you until those prisoners are released."

"Well, if I must yield so be it; so send for two men I recognize there as Bony Bob and Happy Harry."

The two men were called from the group, and when they approached the outlaw leader, said:

"Men, you have never known me as your leader, only having seen me in a helmet, and in the garb of a chief, wearing full war-

paint; but I will give you certain signs by which you will know me, and it is my wish that you go to the head Sioux village and report that I am a prisoner and will be scalped alive and sent to them if they do not give up the white captives now there in exchange for me."

"You are to go with an escort of scouts, and you are to make no mistake, while Surgeon Powell here will tell you just where you are to join him."

"When you bring the captives to the rendezvous, why then we are to be set free."

The outlaw emphasized the *we*, and Surgeon Powell said nothing.

The two men agreed to do as asked, and the other prisoners and the wounded were sent on to the fort, just as the command, going to reinforce Captain Taylor came in sight.

But, Surgeon Powell, after a short interview with the commanding officer set off at a more rapid pace with his men than the troops could keep up, and there was a scout sent ahead at a still swifter rate of travel to call off from the command of Captain Taylor, Buffalo Bill and Trapper Dennis and the others whom the doctor wished to take with him, and these were to join him at a given point in the mountains.

The scout found the Trapper's Mound besieged by Indians, who had made several charges upon the strong position held by Captain Taylor, so could not get in, and returned to so report to the Surgeon Scout.

After a moment of thought Surgeon Powell said:

"We must get the men I need, so I will have to await the attack of the relief force; but your two men, Don Eduardo, can start at once, get the captives out, and bring them by the lower valley so as to avoid meeting the retreating Indians."

"We can then go that way and meet them at Eagle Nest Rocks."

Having sent the Don's two men off on their mission, with full instructions, Surgeon Powell returned with the rest of his party to aid in the attack upon the Sioux.

He was just in time, as the Sioux did not expect the coming of help so soon, and were preparing for a charge on the Mound as soon as night came on, so that the first intimation they had of a foe in their rear, was the firing of the two guns, which sent shells whistling into their midst.

Then the troopers charged, the mounted infantry advanced as skirmishers, the guns stampeded the Indian ponies, and in a short while the whole Sioux force was rushing for the mountains for safety.

In the thick of the fight Surgeon Powell suddenly appeared, and half an hour after he was away, accompanied by Buffalo Bill, Trapper Dennis, Texas Jack and the others he wished to accompany him, while the troops were to pursue the flying Indians far into the mountains.

CHAPTER LXVIII.

CONCLUSION.

It was a complete stampede for the redskins, and many a war-painted warrior was left dead in the valley.

The two Englishmen had fought with conspicuous gallantry in the battle, and were loud in their praises afterward of how the American soldiers had behaved.

When at last the dawn came, in the camps there were found to be a number of missing, who had been in the thick of the fight.

Among them were Buffalo Bill, Surgeon Powell, Texas Jack and the rest of the party who had gone to the rescue of the white captives, in the Indian camp.

Captain Taylor simply said that the command would move on up into the mountains for a short distance, while the wounded men were sent back to the fort along with the horses captured from the outlaws' retreat, and the many ponies taken from the Indians.

He wished to be within supporting distance of the rescue party, should their services be needed.

After penetrating half a day's journey into the mountains, firing his guns so as to give the Indians an idea that their village was to be attacked, and thus causing all the warriors to assemble there to its defense, thus keeping any from following the captives, when sent out, Captain Taylor turned about and marched down to Massacre Valley again.

It was late when the command went into camp there, and the tired soldiers were glad enough to seek rest.

The following day passed and still the force did not leave camp, to the great surprise of the men.

What their commander could be waiting for they could not understand.

Another night passed away, and just as all were preparing for breakfast a small party of horsemen was seen approaching.

The tall form of the chief of scouts, Buffalo Bill, and that of the Surgeon Scout, were recognized, and following them, mounted upon Indian ponies, were a score of white captives, but clad in Indian costume.

There were men, women and children, and their faces showed that they had suffered much, but were then happy over their release.

The party were greeted with cheer after cheer, and the two English officers were eager to find among them Granger Goldhurst, their kinsman and his family.

But Surgeon Powell took them apart, along with Captain Taylor and Buffalo Bill, and told them all that he had discovered.

He told them of the death of Granger Goldhurst, his wife, and her brother, and that yet an heir remained.

Who that heir was he did not at once make known, but said:

"I wish to say, Captain Taylor, that Don Eduardo Vincente, the outlaw officer, if not the Deserter captain I set free for the information I gleaned from him."

"Through him I gained possession of those white captives, as the Indians gave them up to save the life of the renegade chief."

"The two outlaws who went after them, I hold as prisoners, but under promise that their lives shall be spared, though they must suffer imprisonment for their crimes."

"The Don's man Amigo pleaded innocence, and the Don said that he was, so he returns to the fort with us."

"He did not care to go with Don Eduardo, it seems, who has departed for parts unknown."

"As for this heir of Granger Goldhurst, let me now tell you that it is a girl, that she is now in Fort Beauvoir, and is known as Mustang Madge, the Daughter of the Fifth, and I have proof enough of her identity, so you have found the heiress, at least, gentlemen, and a fair kins woman, whom you will never have cause to be ashamed of."

This confession of the Surgeon Scout was received with the greatest joy by the two Englishmen, as well as by Captain Taylor, though Lieutenant Onderdonk looked very blue over the good fortune of Madge, which was accounted for by his muttered words:

"As a lady of rank and vast fortune she will never think of me, a poor lieutenant of cavalry."

So back to the fort went the captain's command, and when Colonel Loyal had heard all, Madge was sent for to come to headquarters, and her parents by adoption were asked to accompany her, when all heard the strange story.

"I would rather be an American girl and Daughter of the Fifth Cavalry than Queen of England," was her prompt reply and even the two Englishmen applauded her spirit.

"Now that we have found you, Madge, we will not be in a hurry to return to England, but give you ample time to make up your mind as to your future course," said Lord Lonsfield.

And so it was decided, and though the lovely girl did go to England, and secure her moneyed inheritance, she eventually returned to the United States and became the wife of Lieutenant Otey Onderdonk on the very day he was made a captain for "gallant services upon the field."

Trapper Dennis was so generously rewarded by the two Englishmen for his services that he has an income to support him in his old age, and refusing all recompense, both Buffalo Bill and Surgeon Powell were presented with a medal from the Queen for the noble services they rendered one whom her Majesty claimed as a subject, and they are justly proud of the decoration thus received, but still consider themselves among the numerous fathers of Mustang Madge, the Daughter of the Fifth.

THE END.

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